

Murray lays down marker with defeat of Davydenko

Neil Harmon, Tennis Correspondent

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The first week of the season is not a definitive litmus test for the fortunes of the next 12 months, but Andy Murray's appearance in the final of the Qatar Open today is as credible a statement of intent for 2007 as it is possible to deliver.

There are few more satisfying scalps to collect in the men's game than that of Nikolay Davydenko, not least because the Russian was the brick wall that stood between the Scot and a place in last year's US Open quarter-finals. Murray was the No 17 seed for that championship and finished the year ranked No 17; Davydenko, the No 7 seed, rose to No 3 and reached the Masters Cup in Shanghai.

Yesterday, shaking off the effects of the desert chill and a virus that left him short of breath and heavy of leg, the 19-year-old triumphed 7-5, 6-2 in 91 minutes, striking out with a confidence and precision that bodes well for the weeks ahead.

Today he faces Ivan Ljubicic, the Croatian world No 5, who has lost the past two finals in Doha and who had to save two match points in the semi-final to defeat Robin Söderling, of Sweden.

These are the kind of challenges that the British No 1 relishes. Nothing whets his appetite more than the prospect of pitting his talents against the best. If his return of Ljubicic's potent serve is consistent and he remains as beguiling as he was yesterday from the back of the court, Murray has an outstanding chance of claiming a title before most players have shaken off the cobwebs of December's inactivity.

"Any final on the tour at 19 is a great effort," Murray said. "I wanted to build on my performances day by day and that's what I've done. I have got better and better. I didn't know what to expect this week, but I knew I was good enough to make the final.

"This is one of the best wins of my career. Davydenko is a great player, one of the most consistent on the tour. I had lost to him twice before, so this is a nice feeling. I did everything well — I hit to a good length and stayed consistent." More of the same today and it will have been an exceptional week.

Murray puts growing pains behind him in show of maturity

Neil Harman, Tennis Correspondent in Melbourne

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From immature youth to well-rounded, considered champion-in-waiting and a quarter of an inch taller in the past six weeks. It has been a traumatic 12 months for Andy Murray, one that has added emphatic substance to his desire to make an eloquent statement of intent, and why should it not happen here, in the city that embraces sporting heroes like no other? When Murray left Melbourne after a shocker of a first-round defeat by Juan Ignacio Chela, of Argentina, in the Australian Open last January, he was at odds with the world, most decidedly with himself, Mark Petchey, his coach, and those chroniclers who, he insisted, expected too much of him and were too sharply splenetic when he did not come up to scratch.

Yet this morning he was given his highest seeding yet for a Grand Slam. Seeded 15th for next week's tournament, he has been ranked four places ahead of home favourite Lleyton Hewitt. Roger Federer, the reigning champion, tops the list, while Maria Sharapova leads the female seedings, one position ahead of Amelie Mauresmo, the other 2006 singles winner.

A trace of suspicion remains, which is probably healthy because few become champions with everyone choreographed to their tune. Petchey has gone, not only from his role as Murray's coach but also from Britain, having decided to relocate in South Africa. Brad Gilbert is in his place and watched yesterday, with his wife and two youngest children, as his protégé began to get used to the daunting environs of a spectacularly special place.

On Christmas Eve in Melbourne, it was 40C, Christmas Day was 16C and it snowed in the surrounding peaks. Yesterday, the mercury hovered around 36C, about where it will probably average out during the Open, which starts on Monday. A stiffening westerly wind caused shirts and flags to billow, so Murray's straight-sets win over Ivan Ljubicic in his opening round-robin match of the AAMI Classic in Kooyong was a neatly judged piece of work.

It was the Scot's sixth match of the year after five on the tour proper in Doha. The seventh will come today against Andy Roddick, the American — whom he defeated twice last year — and then perhaps a final on Saturday, by which time the British No 1 will know his Open draw and what perils await on the burning Rebound Ace of Melbourne Park.

The 19-year-old's manner yesterday was a joy to behold. There was not much to get contentious about on the court because exhibition events are a feeling-out process where a player tries to function while finding his feet. Should Murray play impromptu serve and volley, taking returns off the middle of his chest and flicking the ball into the open court when the chips are down in the first round next week, it will be a shock.

But there is something particularly imposing about him now that was not evident here 12 months ago. “I have learnt how to deal with this [a press conference] better, I’m a lot stronger in myself and don’t let things get to me as much,” he said. “With the work I’ve been doing on the court, I’m much more balanced and I don’t get overpowered by those guys who are much bigger than me. I was a kid in 2006, but I’ve started to grow up a bit. I feel much better about everything than this time last year.”

He is a more fearsome specimen, too, at 6ft 3in and 175lb — no one can kick sand in his face any more. And there are important people to call upon if the going should get tougher. Judy, his mother, remains a stalwart and on the day that Gloria Connors, the matron of matriarchal mothers, passed away, her significance on her son’s career was intensified.

Mrs Connors pushed and pushed some more as her son, Jimmy, won a record 209 titles, eight of them in grand-slam events. She was a remarkable woman, deserving Jimmy’s remarkable testament. “She had an unwavering passion for tennis and all my life, she taught me, making me a world champion and getting me to do things without my even realising,” he said. “She instilled passion, excitement and enthusiasm into me that was contagious to everyone around me. And yet, separately, she was my mother and my friend.”

In that, young Murray has a blood relation. “It wasn’t like I didn’t have a choice,” he said. “I played a lot of sports when I was growing up. All parents are different and all children respond differently to how their parents are.

“I’m grateful for the way that my mum brought me up and she never pushed me to one thing or another. I just want my mum to be my mum, not have her teaching me how to make a living. I wouldn’t want her here and I’d feel pressure on our relationship as a mother and a son. I’m happy having it the way it is just now.”

Murray falls at final hurdle

Those who still regard the ATP Champions Race as something more than a total irrelevance at this early stage of the year will point out that Murray will never have a better chance to be No 1. He would treat such an observation as crass; like every other player on the men’s Tour, he only pays heed to his ongoing year-round ranking, but a failure to add a second title to the one he picked up in San Jose 11 months ago will annoy him.

Once both players had found their length and rhythm, they produced a superb standard of tennis to warm the most frigid of evenings as the chill of the desert caused the hardy spectators at the Khalifa stadium to wrap themselves in blankets and towels.

Murray had the chance to repeatedly catch 27-year-old Ljubicic cold and did not take the chance. Eight break points wasted, six of them in the opening game, is regarded as a cardinal sin by anyone with the talent and potential of Murray. He can try to comfort himself that he is guaranteed a highest-ever ranking position when the ATP's computer clicks into action tomorrow morning and he will be one of the top 16 seeds for the Australian Open beginning in eight days' time. But he will be angry that this one that got away.

Ljubicic, beaten in the Doha final in 2004 and 2005, had good reason to start sluggishly. His semi-final 24 hours earlier against Sweden's Robin Soderling was an extended affair, with the big-serving Croat coming from behind to win in the third set tie-break. A round earlier he was kept on court even longer by Mikhail Youzhny, of Russia, with the match clock ticking past three hours before victory was achieved.

Murray, who produced one of the most impressive performances of his career to outplay world No 3 Nikolay Davydenko in his semi-final and looked to have shrugged off the virus that troubled him earlier in the tournament, is perfectly equipped to take advantage.

Three horrendous Ljubicic errors catapulted the teenage Scot to a 40-0 lead in the first game, but all three break points went to waste, the last with the kind of slack overhead smash into the net that would infuriate a park player. Eventually, the opening game extended 14 minutes and through 18 points, but ominously the last went to the more experienced man.

When Murray let two more break points slip in the seventh game, he resorted to complaining about a few debatable line calls to the French umpire, Cedric Mourier. Ljubicic eventually took the first set by sheer stealth, raising his game by several levels at the crucial moment. He showed great pace and anticipation to reach a Murray drop shot and hit the cleanest of passes to move to set point and then immediately forced his opponent into an errant forehand long.

By now Ljubicic had struck on the tactic of patiently staying in the long rallies with Murray and trying to outmanoeuvre the younger, more petulant man. Then, suddenly, a few moments of slackness saw the Croat produce a couple of slack backhand errors. That was enough to hand Murray a long overdue break of serve.

Murray's coach, Brad Gilbert, could only shake his head in dismay as a final gift-wrapped opportunity went to waste. Ljubicic broke back immediately and by now the momentum, added to his greater experience, was sufficient to propel him to victory even though it required four match points.

Murray tried to take the positives from the match. “I played okay,” he said. “You have to take your chances against Ljubicic and I didn’t do that. It’s a great start to the year, though.

“Obviously I would have rather won, but to get to the final is perfect. I should be feeling pretty good when I go into Australia.”

Draw puts Nadal test in Murray’s sights

Neil Harman, Tennis Correspondent, in Melbourne

Published at 12:00AM, January 12 2007

Andy Murray would not have swapped his draw at the Australian Open for anyone’s. The British No 1 will play Alberto Martín, of Spain, in the first round, with the prospect of an enthralling fourth-round match against the French Open champion, Rafael Nadal — the one player he really wants to test himself against.

The Scot has missed all the real big hitters. Roger Federer, who plays Bjorn Phau, of Germany, in the opening round, has a harmless-looking introduction to his attempt on a tenth grand-slam tournament title. Marcos Baghdatis, the Cypriot who lost to Federer in last year’s final, is a prospective quarter-final opponent this time around.

Richard Bloomfield will not join Murray, his fellow Briton, in the first round after he was eliminated from the tournament in the first qualifying round in bizarre circumstances.

Remember Bloomfield? He is the baby-faced 23-year-old British No 5 from Norfolk who, after his first-round victory at Wimbledon last year over Carlos Berlocq, the Argentinian who had never won a grand slam match, had never played on grass and who could muster only five games in defeat, was greeted by reports that more than £300,000 had been matched on Betfair on his success.

There could not have been much placed on the outcome of Bloomfield’s match on Court No 7 here against Matt Ebden, ranked No 897 in the world, and if anyone had backed the Australian it would have seemed frivolous when he trailed 4-1, 40-30 in the third set. But Ebden clawed back to 6-6 when, by their demeanour, both players had it in their mind that the match would be decided by a tie-break.

This, however, is a grand-slam tournament in which the final set is played to its completion. Bloomfield served and lost the first point. “Love-15,” Marija Cicak, the Croatian umpire, said. The balls were rolled to the opposite end, Ebden served, won the point and the umpire called: “Love-30”. The two players approached the chair, believing that it should be 2-0.

The umpire was in a mess, realising that she should not have let Ebden serve but having to stick to the rule that “if, in a standard game, a player serves out of turn, the score will be corrected at the next available moment”. So, love-30 had to stand.

Bloomfield lost his cool, for although the rule is there in black and white, how stupid it is that an opponent can be allowed to serve in someone else’s service game, win a point and not lose it because of an umpire’s culpability.

Bloomfield kicked his chair and railed against “this bulls***”, but the normally unflappable character’s competitive juices evaporated and he tumbled to a 6-3, 5-7, 8-6 defeat, a 10,000-mile journey in ruins.

John Lloyd, the Great Britain Davis Cup captain who watched the first set, had left by this time. He had five men to follow yesterday, giving as much time to each as he merited. He wants one or more to compete for a singles place this year and will not, Bloomfield hopes, come up with the same reason for not picking him as Jeremy Bates, the previous captain — “a pretty lame excuse that I am a quiet person and didn’t know how I’d be in a team situation”.

Bloomfield will have team company on the way home. Alex Bogdanovic, the British No 3, lost in straight sets to George Bastl, from Switzerland, in the second round of Wimbledon in 2002. Jamie Baker also made his exit, but Alan Mackin — who defeated Davide Sanguinetti, of Italy — and Jonny Marray fight on.

Of the three British women, two (Anne Keothavong and Katie O’Brien) survived and one (Melanie South) succumbed. A pity, then, that James Trotman, a former Australian Open junior doubles champion who has been earning a considerable reputation with the LTA as a coach of the leading women, has resigned from the association’s brave new world and opted to work for Tennis Australia.

Comment: Murray must beware the next round

Neil Harman, Tennis Correspondent

Published at 12:00AM, January 16 2007

Murray | Comment: Barry Flatman | Report: day two | Djokovic | Police
When he smacked the face of his racket after missing a forehand that would have given him 15-all in the sixth game of the third set, you knew how much it meant to Andy Murray to have secured his first ever “triple bagel” a 6-0, 6-0, 6-0 victory. Instead, Murray had to

make do with 6-0,6-0,6-1 against Alberto Martin of Spain, a match that really wasn't a match at all.

It is hard to know how to try to analyse Murray's first win in the Australian Open, for it all felt terribly hollow. But give the 19-year-old British No 1 his due, when he needed to turn the screw, he turned it emphatically and kept it turned. Poor Martin could barely keep a ball in the court, he sprayed it far and wide but that should not detract from Murray's bravura display, one made all the more encouraging in that he had been kept waiting all day to play, and then found himself on a different court to the one on which he had been originally scheduled.

It was on the Vodafone Arena where Murray had succumbed in the first round last year to Juan Ignacio Chela, of Argentina, so there were some wrongs to right. The backdrop was not encouraging, for a lot of people had left their seats after James Blake's emphatic victory over Carlos Moya, perhaps not realising there was at least one more match to be played there. Murray had to create his own competitive environment for Martin offered nothing by way of a physical or mental challenge.

The match might have been being staged in Lyon, Marseille or Stuttgart, for the roof was closed and the atmosphere bore little relation to what a Grand Slam ought to mean. But Murray will look back with much pride on such a resounding victory, one he greeted with a devastating forehand flourish.

The one thing that can be said for sure is that the next round is bound to be more treacherous..

Is Andy Murray truly world class?

Published at 12:00AM, January 17 2007

Andy Murray lost his Australian Open fourth round match against Rafael Nadal in five sets, but won many admirers. At 2-1 up, he had the world No 2 looking worried and it took some extraordinary tennis for the Spaniard to turn it around.

The Scot never looked out of his depth and proved that his first round 6-0, 6-0, 6-1 humbling of Alberto Martin was no fluke.

Ranked No 15 in the world, Murray already has many impressive scalps on his CV, including Roger Federer and Andy Roddick as well as one ATP Tour title, in San Jose last year.

The former US Open junior champion has taken over from Tim Henman as the British No 1 and now looks likely to be the first British man to win a grand slam since Fred Perry in 1936. So is the 19-year-old already a world force in tennis? Has he really got the talent to win a major title? Is he still many years off his peak?

Or is Murray another flash in the pan? A Brit who promises much but delivers nothing? Is he really worthy of all the hype?

Whatever your thoughts, post them in the comment box below.

Maturing Murray sweats it out

times online and agencies

Published at 12:00AM, January 18 2007

Comment: Neil Harman | Comment: Barry Flatman | Report | Debate

Andy Murray showed further signs of his growing maturity as he ground out a hard-fought victory in the second round of the Australian Open. The Scot's temperament and stamina have been questioned in the past when things have gone against him but he dug in deep in the searing Melbourne heat to see off Fernando Verdasco in straight sets.

The 7-6, 7-5, 6-4 scoreline does not reflect how tough it was for the British No 1, but he accepts the workout will stand him in good stead for the next stage, where he meets Juan Ignacio Chela. "It was really tough today," Murray said. "The conditions were very warm and my feet were burning.

"I would rather be playing indoors. [The heat] is really tough. It takes a lot out of you. But I've done a lot of fitness training and I'm hoping that it pays off in these conditions."

Murray lost his serve three times in the opening set but broke back each time and took the tiebreak to put himself in command. The 19-year-old also trailed 4-1 in the second set but hauled himself level and went on to take the set, clinching it after the Spaniard had received treatment for blisters.

"He did a lot of running and he has a great serve and forehand," Murray said of his opponent. "There were a lot of rallies and it was difficult but I had great support and that helped pull me through."

Murray kept his nerve in the third and, after Verdasco had saved four match points, he sealed a scrappy but reasonably comfortable victory. The World No 15 is fully aware, however, that Chela promises a much stiffer challenge in the last 32. "He is a really good player who just missed out on a seeding here so it's going to be really difficult.

"He plays very well in these conditions and beat [Lleyton] Hewitt last year. I know it's going to be tricky but if I play to my best and have the support of the crowd maybe I can win this time."

Murray drew on that support in the opening set when he fought back to cancel out those three service breaks and then faced a set point before edging it 7-6, taking the tiebreak 7-4. He had three break points for a 2-1 lead in the second set and, when Verdasco saved them and took the game, the Scot soon found himself 4-1 down.

But Murray showed his tenacity, taking advantage of Verdasco's inability to close out the set before sealing it 7-5 to take a stranglehold on the match. Murray won the first the game of

the third set to love on Verdasco's serve and held a dominant position at 4-1 before the Spaniard broke back. Eventually, Murray's persistence and pressure paid off as he closed out 6-4 to book his place in the third round.

Murray beginning to win over the locals with his battling qualities

Neil Harman, Tennis Correspondent, in Melbourne

Published at 12:00AM, January 19 2007

The AM Fan Club in golden shirts were in their rollicking element on Vodafone Arena yesterday. First, Alicia Molik woke from a sleepy start and surged into the third round of the women's singles and then Andy Murray arrived to repeat method and outcome in the men's championship. In both cases, the support lapped it up and in both came affirmation of burgeoning grand-slam tournament aspirations.

Molik has much to live up to, for it has been an interminable wait since the vintage of Margaret Court, Evonne Goolagong Cawley and the unheralded Chris O'Neil, who was the last Australian winner of the Open, in 1978. Murray has alighted with no such burdens. However, two straight-set victories is a decisive accomplishment. The likelihood of Murray rolling over Fernando Verdasco with as much emphasis as he had Alberto Martín, his Spanish compatriot, in the first round was remote.

It should be remembered that Verdasco had been lucky to reach the second round, after Paul-Henri Mathieu, of France, rolled his ankle when leading by two sets and 3-0 in the third-set tie-break. Verdasco spent three hours at a local hospital commiserating with Mathieu, the gesture of a genuine sportsman.

By virtue of his 7-6, 7-5, 6-4 defeat by the British No 1, Verdasco had earned £12,500 without winning a set in two matches — which must be considered a novelty. The search for bigger prizes goes on for the Scot, starting tomorrow against Juan Ignacio Chela, the Argentinian who defeated him in the first round last year but whose greatest impact on this tournament came a year earlier when he spat at Lleyton Hewitt as he walked by his chair at a changeover. It promises to be a testy confrontation.

Murray should have nothing to fear if he can come out of the blocks a little more smoothly than he did against Verdasco. The first set involved six breaks of serve and turned midway through the tie-break when, having rubbed his eyes as if they were full of sleep, the Scot produced in successive points one flicked forehand cross-court winner, followed by a repeat from the opposite flank, having drawn Verdasco forward with a delicate short ball.

It was a match that was formed of irregular patches. In the middle of the second set, Murray won one of 14 points and was walking to the chair when Verdasco was in the midst of

serving an ace, as if he was OK with throwing the set away. His response was to break twice and, when serving for a conclusive lead at 6-5, he watched a couple of Spanish errors fly out of court, adding a somewhat mocking “yeah, yeah” by way of confirmation.

From here, Murray obviously wanted to show his mettle and raced into a 4-1 lead in the third, but Verdasco sneaked his way back and, eventually, forced the Scot to sweat on four match points before a service winner — something he would love to bring to his game more regularly — confirmed his place in the last 32. “I feel like I can improve all parts of my game, but when my serve is on, it’s a pretty dangerous shot,” he said. “It’s more of a strength rather than a technique thing. The stronger I get, the better my serve will become.”

What comes as a revelation to Murray is how much his tennis is championed here, so far from home. It is possible the Australians are putting the names down for a Murray support group, with painted blue faces and white diagonal crosses as marks of admission. “I can’t believe so many people enjoy watching me play, because it [his style] is definitely not very interesting,” he said, breaking into a grin. The fact is that Murray playing the way he does demands converts. The more the merrier.

Back home, there is encouraging news of the knee injury that forced Tim Henman, the British No 2, to abandon this championship, only the second of 45 grand-slam tournaments he has missed. Although he confessed to “slow progress” with the right knee he hurt in training before Christmas, the news was more optimistic from his latest scan and he remains confident of returning to the tour in Zagreb the week after next.

Bring on Nadal

Murray sets up Monday clash with No2

BARRY FLATMAN

He has already beaten enough big names to answer that question with assurance: Roger Federer, Nikolay Davydenko, Ivan Ljubicic, Andy Roddick, Lleyton Hewitt. Even Tim Henman. One name is missing from that list, the one that has preyed on the young Scot’s mind since he went to hone his game in Spain and became aware of a rival whose tutors believed that he would become the world’s finest.

Now Murray, boosted in the opening weeks of 2007 by another growth spurt in his progress to maturity, will walk on to Rod Laver Arena tomorrow to face Rafael Nadal in a confrontation he has dreamt about for years.

As he does before confronting any player of note, and in contrast to his dismay at the suggestion that he has some way to go before establishing himself in the cream of the

men's game, he initially dismissed his chances of beating the French Open champion. "I don't think I've got a chance to win," he said at courtside, in front of the Scottish fans who had enthusiastically celebrated his straight-sets win over Juan Ignacio Chela.

Shortly afterwards, Muzza, as he has become known, was more optimistic. Pessimism is not becoming of a teenager who has yet to drop a set in three rounds of the year's opening Grand Slam, and his 6-3 6-2 6-4 win took his standard of performance to new levels.

"If I play like I did tonight, I'll have a good chance of keeping the match close," he said of his first competitive encounter with Nadal. "I have a game that can cause him some problems. It's easy to have a game plan against him. Carrying that out in a positive way is another thing."

When Nadal arrived in Melbourne, he was dubious about his own chances. A thigh injury forced him to retire from the warm-up tournament in Sydney and he was unsure of the Rebound Ace surface that was reputedly far quicker than when he last played the Australian Open two years ago. However, a combination of intense heat and incessant rain has caused all three of his matches to be played under closed roofs and the slower conditions have helped his acclimatisation.

Nadal's 6-2 6-2 6-2 win over Stanislas Wawrinka of Switzerland was his most dynamic performance yet. "I play good today," he said. "Very, very good. But next it is Murray, which is 100% different. You can't compare the matches, no? We will see Murray's improving his game. He's still very young."

Youthful perhaps, but considerably more worldly and assured than he was a year ago, when Chela sent him home in straight sets after a disappointing first-round performance. Then, Murray seemed confused by the game plan set for him and at odds with the situation. A year on, he stuck to the strategy formulated with his coach, Brad Gilbert, and exploited every weakness of the 33rd-ranked Argentine.

The pair determined that Chela's movement around the court was not fluent, although pre-match rumours emanating from the locker room that a sprained ankle made him a doubtful starter proved inaccurate. Murray nevertheless continued to move him around the court and worked on the belief that frustration would ultimately take a hand.

Chela's forehand was singled out for attack, and when Murray registered his opening break of serve, he gloriously wrong-footed his opponent with the depth of his shot. Murray is respected as one of the prime all-court players of the new generation and he was utilising every inch of the playing surface. He approached the net to volley with a confidence he did not possess even a few months ago and served with the authority of a player who appreciated that he had the upper hand.

As the match progressed, his superiority became steadily more evident. He won five games in a row to clinch the second set and continued the trend by breaking serve again at the beginning of the third. Chela desperately attempted to rally and twice broke serve before the end, but it was only token resistance and did not tarnish one of Murray's most assured Grand Slam performances.

"When Andy went out to play Chela on this same court a year ago he was just a kid, but now he's a pro," said Gilbert. "I didn't see that match, but I've heard a lot about it and this performance showed the distance he has come within a year. Now Andy is good enough to play with anyone in the world and Nadal is a good place to find out exactly how good you are."

Today player and coach will take to the practice court after discussion on how to confront the best left-handed player in the world. Ironically, Murray's elder brother Jamie, another left-hander and the perfect practice partner with whom to formulate strategy, was on a flight jetting home from Australia as his sibling moved through to the last 16 of the third Grand Slam tournament in succession.

Nevertheless Murray is not overawed by the task that awaits. Naturally there is an abundance of respect, but he is planning not just for tomorrow. He is looking forward to a long series of matches that he hopes will develop into a rivalry. "Everybody knows how he plays," said Murray. "I'm just looking forward to seeing how my game matches up against his. He obviously hits a very heavy ball and it probably bounces higher than most of the guys. It probably comes through the court quicker and he's a lefty as well, which makes it tricky."

If he is successful, questions about membership of the game's elite will be answered. Vacancies are occurring at the top, and Murray believes the time is right to take residence.

Next generation keen to master old art

A desire to learn how to use the volley marks out the two best teenagers in the world

PAT CASH

Published: 21 January 2007

They have both come to realise that an all-court game, with as many options as possible, is the key to success. That's what has established Roger Federer as the outstanding player of this era and this young pair have taken heed.

Both learnt their tennis playing from the baseline, both possess tremendously strong groundstrokes and serve well, and both saw the need to add something to their games. Many pundits insist the volley is no longer the forceful shot that once played a key part in every player's game, and for good reason: the courts are slower, the ball bounces higher and racket technology means that passing shots are hit much harder and hence are more difficult to pick off close to the net.

Whenever a young player has asked me for advice in the past couple of years, I have told them if they want to stay at the back of the court, then good luck, but Rafael Nadal and his like are much better at that game and are just waiting to get them. Explore other options: the best one is getting in to the net.

Not that volleying in today's game is the same as it was when John McEnroe, Stefan Edberg and I used to try to rush-attack every ball. Back then, because few opponents based themselves 10 feet behind the baseline, we were always looking to hit a crisp volley towards the back corners of the court and keep the ball low. Nowadays, with different court surfaces and balls, it would be inviting disaster — the ball would come whistling back past you.

So Djokovic and Murray have adopted a different technique. They don't rush in straight behind their serve or chip and charge on the return. They use their groundstroke skill to create the potential to approach the net nine or more strokes into the rally and then take the pace off the ball by hitting a stop volley that almost dies as it crosses the net. Then they add an angle on forehand or backhand that ensures the ball veers out wide across the tramlines before it has cleared the service box.

The summer before last, I played an exhibition tournament on grass in Liverpool. Djokovic was there, preparing for his first Wimbledon. He was barely 18, a week younger than Murray, and just off the Challenger circuit, but he was clearly destined for the world top 100. I needed a practice hit because I was playing Henri Leconte the next day.

I was impressed by Djokovic's range of shots, even though grass was an alien surface to him. As the session progressed, the young Serb was asking me more and more about the way to volley properly.

The fundamentals of volleying are basic reflex and good agility, which is necessary for the right positioning. Players must try to get their heads over the ball, adopt a short backswing and lock a firm wrist. That is the opposite to the way youngsters are taught to play their shots these days. There is no substitute for playing doubles if you want to work on a volley technique. It worked for me and it even worked for Tim Henman. The ATP Tour's attitude to doubles may be half-hearted — it appears to regard it as little more than a hindrance — but youngsters should be encouraged to play.

As he prepared to face Federer at the Australian Open, Djokovic admitted he has been working hard on his volleys, citing the world No 1 as the perfect example.

I have never had the pleasure of sitting down with Murray in the same way, but clearly his coach Brad Gilbert has talked tirelessly, as only he can, and impressed on the youngster the importance of adopting an effective volley.

Looking at his game at the beginning of the year in Qatar, when he lost in the final, then this month at Kooyong and on the evidence of his first three rounds at Melbourne Park, he has become far more adept at the volley and can be described as an all-court player. Apart from Djokovic, that is not something you can say for too many other teenagers.

Comment: Murray is right to focus on the bigger picture

Barry Flatman, Sunday Times Tennis Correspondent

Published at 12:00AM, January 22 2007

Brave Murray | Debate | Report: day 8

Nobody should berate Andy Murray for his insistence that he is not disappointed at his Australian Open defeat. Regrets about a series of unconverted break points would be natural but the big picture is something the young Scot should focus on and his five set encounter with Rafael Nadal was the most pertinent tennis lesson he has ever received.

The match produced the best quality tennis and the most suspense of the tournament so far and hopefully will serve as the introduction of a gripping rivalry that will enliven men's tennis way into the next decade.

In the end, Murray lost out to the robust Majorcan because he is not so experienced in the art of winning marathon matches and his fitness is inferior to a player who is regarded as the strongest in tennis. But compare this defeat to Murray's lacklustre demise against Marcos Baghdatis at Wimbledon last summer, his complete physical deflation after leading David Nalbandian a year earlier or his second-rate effort when confronted with Nikolay Davydenko at the US Open just four months ago, and it was a performance that showed how far he has progressed.

Even when he beat Roger Federer last August in Cincinnati he did not play to the standard he achieved against Nadal and had he resorted to a challenge with the Hawk-Eye line-calling technology early in the fourth set, he would have been awarded a crucial break and serve and the result might well have been very different.

But enough looking back, now is the time to consider the future. Murray's talent and rapidly improving levels of fitness and on-court awareness ensure that he is a top flight performer perfectly capable of winning grand slam titles. More short term, his three victories at Melbourne Park will push him extremely close to a place in the world's top ten.

Not bad for a young man who was only playing in his seventh grand slam tournament and had not even made his full ATP debut less than two years ago.

Brave Murray falls at the final hurdle

times online and agencies

Published at 12:00AM, January 22 2007

Comment: Barry Flatman | Debate | Report: day 8

Andy Murray's dreams of a first grand slam quarter-final were dashed in a five-set thriller against Rafael Nadal, the world No 2. The Scottish teenager won the first and third sets to lead 2-1 but could not close out the match and Nadal eventually won 6-7, 6-4, 4-6, 6-3, 6-1. For long periods the pair were evenly-matched but Nadal's greater experience told in the crucial fifth set as Murray squandered a service break early on while the Spaniard won two in the first four games to put him on course for victory.

"I'm definitely not disappointed," Murray said afterwards. "I think you can come off after matches, [such as] when I played [Marcos] Baghdatis at Wimbledon, [and feel] like I didn't play well, that my attitude wasn't as good as it should have been. Tonight, I felt like I played a really good match. He came out with some great shots when he needed them.

"I'm glad that I went out there and played for three hours and 50 minutes with one of the fittest guys. It didn't come down to a physical thing."

Murray added: "I had game points in the first four games of the fifth set. It just could have been a different match. I missed a few shots by a couple of inches. It happens. You've just got to accept it, live to fight another day.

"I've never played Nadal before. He's obviously a great player and he's going to be one of the best players ever, that's for sure. I had chances to win. I'm going to learn a lot from this. He has a little bit more experience than me.

"I was happy with the way that I fought. A few points here or there - it could have been a different outcome."

The first set, which Murray won on a tie-break, seemed a long time ago as his opponent powered his way to victory. In that opening set, the British No 1 had shown great character after surviving the first break point - a set point to Nadal at 6-5 - but some big first serves when he needed them most secured the tie-break.

the pair traded mini-breaks before a wild shot from Nadal gave Murray the edge at 5-3, and when the Spaniard stretched to reach a Murray lob and fired wide he had three set points. The Scot won the set when he successfully challenged a shot which went long from his 20-year-old opponent.

The 19-year-old from Dunblane had the luxury of three break points in game two of the second set but Nadal battled back to hold. Murray then showed immense character when he found himself two break points down after a series of unforced errors in game three. Nadal was made to work hard to retrieve two arrowing first serves and Murray completed the recovery with a stunning ace, his third of the match.

The break Murray craved came in the fourth game as he forced deuce and Nadal, who has never lost to a younger opponent on the senior tour, powered a forehand low into the net. Murray consolidated the break to go 4-1 up, coming out on top in a superb rally at 15-15 in the fifth game.

Nadal held then claimed the break back in Murray's next service game as a two-handed backhand went long, and held again to level the set at 4-4. Murray's service game crumbled in game nine and it was apt that he conceded the crucial break with a double-fault to put Nadal in charge, and the muscular Majorcan closed out the set 6-4 on serve.

Two double-faults in a row, his fifth and sixth of the match, handed Nadal a break on a plate in the third game of the next set. Much of the fluency was now missing from Murray's game, but he doggedly hung in and won the break back to move to 3-3 when Nadal's forehand from the baseline flew long.

The next two games went with serve but at 15-30 down in the ninth the Scot missed a simple backhand volley at the net but battled back well to go 5-4 ahead. Murray then had two set points on the Spaniard's next serve and needed both to claim a 2-1 lead.

Murray opened the fourth set with an ace as he raced into a 40-0 lead only to drive long and then into the net before needing a stroke of luck with a net cord to win the game. He was 30-0 up against the Nadal serve until he drilled a forehand and two backhands into the net to allow his opponent to hold on.

Murray found himself in an even better position in the fourth game with three break points only to squander all of them and, despite him earning another two on He responded with a flawless service game to love but on his next serve he faced two break points at 30-40 and advantage and succumbed to the second to trail 4-3. Nadal comfortably held his serve and took the match into a deciding set after a Murray double fault.

Murray had a chance to break immediately but sent his cross-court backhand marginally wide and then faced similar pressure on his own serve which he could not withstand as Nadal claimed an early 2-0 lead. An error of judgement when he had two break points in the next saw the Scottish teenager play a backhand which was heading into the tramlines and his opponent recovered.

Murray appeared to lose his focus and a second break gave Nadal a 4-0 lead, which the Spaniard extended with another successful serve. The Scot delayed the inevitable by finally making his mark on the scoreboard but the end came just before 2am local time.

Bananas split opinions while Muzza fails to tic the same boxes as fastidious Rafa

Giles Smith: Sport on Television

Published at 12:00AM, January 23 2007

So committed was BBC Two to following Andy Murray's match against Rafael Nadal in Melbourne yesterday morning that it pulled *Boogie Beebies*, the aerobic workout slot for pre-schoolers, and inserted the tennis. Disappointment, then, for the nation's dancing toddlers, although there was mild consolation, possibly, in the sight of John Inverdale in one of his funny shirts.

From somewhere inside what appeared to be two sheets of wrapping paper with buttons, Inverdale introduced us to a match billed in Australia (and for one brief but spectacular moment on a screen in the BBC studio) as "Rafa v Muzza". But who would prevail? Muzza or Rafa? Andrew Castle, no stranger to the sofas of morning television, optimistically reported that Muzza is "absolutely chiselled at the moment". Apparently, by deploying top-level fitness trainers, the British No 1 gained 5lb over the Christmas period, something that many of the rest of us achieved, more cost-efficiently, using mince pies.

Hands up, though, if you could separate the pre-chiselled Muzza from the post-chiselled version when he stepped on court yesterday, in his dodgy cap, his holiday-in-Thailand shorts and his glum navy trainers. What a discouraging contrast with the fascinatingly tidy Rafa, in his banana yellow muscle shirt and silk-look action pants. Note how the pattern on those pants implied the presence of a sarong. It's a brave man who implies the presence of a sarong on an Australian tennis court.

Rafa is a mile ahead of Muzza on nervous tics, too. The intensive ball-bouncing before serving, the fastidious recapping and replacing of his water bottles, the extraordinary attention to detail in the matter of the relative height of his socks — at just 19, Muzza simply has no answer to these levels of compulsive obsession.

There's also the somewhat less sightly manner in which Rafa repeatedly feels obliged to pluck his action pants from his nether regions. Whatever other compulsions he may be prey to, the second best tennis player in the world appears to be a man permanently besieged by the phenomenon known as "boxer creep".

Muzza seemed to be capitalising on that until the second set fell away from him during an apparent medical emergency. As the Scot clutched his rib cage, winced wildly and swore, Chris Bailey in the commentary box quickly diagnosed "some form of discomfort". It's good that these people are there, isn't it? Otherwise we wouldn't have the first clue what was going on.

Bailey was to offer germane analysis later in the match when he passed on the information that the bananas consumed by tennis players during changeovers have little effect, being too

firm and yellow. “It has to be one of those brown, mushy bananas to have an instant impact on your system,” Bailey explained. But isn’t it slow-release energy the players are after, rather than the requirement to take an urgent “comfort break”? The debate about bananas, one feels, will go on.

For many BBC viewers, this will have been a first experience of the new, Hawkeye-assisted challenge system, patiently explained by Bailey at the start of the match. It’s complicated, but, basically, as I understand it, each player starts the set with two challenges to authority, to be used at their discretion. If the set goes to a tie-break, they pick up an additional challenge. They must, however, stay out of the black and into the red — you’ll get nowt in this game for two in a bed.

Also, aces are high, spades are trumps and either player can, at any point, play the joker (unlikely in a match involving Murray and Nadal). And, in the final round, it’s the player who comes closest to making the words “Yvonne Goolagong” from his rack of letters who wins.

Understandably, the new system has divided people. Roger Federer described it as “a nonsense”, although, as John Lloyd democratically said yesterday, “it’s what the fans want”, which is to say that it provides an opportunity to look up at the big screen and go “wooo-aay!” every 20 minutes or so, amusement of a calibre that is not to be sniffed at.

My disappointment relates to the fact that, in the event that the pictures from Hawkeye cause the original call to be overruled, the line judge concerned isn’t subject to direct pillorying of any kind.

The introduction of a custard pie or gunk bucket of some description would certainly enliven these moments, as would compelling the official in question to spend the rest of the match with (an old golf club favourite, this) their trousers down.

As Muzza battled on brilliantly to a noble defeat, Inverdale finally popped the contractually obliged question that had hung over this match about as excitingly as a dentist’s appointment, namely: “What does this potentially do for British tennis?” I was so involved in stifling a yawn at the question that I didn’t quite catch Lloyd’s reply, but I would hazard a guess that it included the words “boost” and “major”.

Much more exciting, surely, to think what it might do for Muzza, now indisputably a top-ranking player, give or take a tic.

Nadal refuses to buckle in ultimate test of skill and endurance

Neil Harman, Tennis Correspondent, in Melbourne

Published at 12:00AM, January 23 2007

Match statistics

It is a compelling tribute to Andy Murray's unbreakable spirit and command of his game in the Rod Laver Arena yesterday that Rafael Nadal's reaction to his victory over the Scot was akin to that when he defeated Roger Federer in the final of last year's French Open.

Rather than falling flat on his back, as he did on the clay of Roland Garros, this time the Spaniard went face down in Melbourne Park, but the exhilaration levels were just as intense. That, in itself, underscores the extent of the challenge he faced in the fourth round of the Australian Open from a player whose path he had crossed only fleetingly, when the pair were sporting adolescents. How they have grown.

Nadal is the second-best player in the world and has beaten Federer, the acknowledged master, six times, which gives an idea of the task that Murray, the No 15 seed, faced. Murray will be nudging the top ten by the time the rankings come out next week and as the BBC threw open its schedules yesterday, he showed a particularly sceptical British tennis nation that he has what it takes to challenge for the sport's great titles.

One can safely say that there will be few times when Murray plays this well and yet when everything tastes so bitter. Strategically and temperamentally, he was brilliant. There was nothing wrong physically and all that mattered was that Nadal was able to dig deeper and call upon that extra special something, a succession of line-brushing shots and extraordinary "gets" that are his trademark.

Even when he was 5-0 down in the final set, Murray would not be quelled. He did not accept that he might lose and was striving for all he was worth, when most of those watching had given up the ghost. They will not do so again. For this is a new Murray, as he had said that he was.

His 6-7, 6-4, 4-6, 6-3, 6-1 defeat was a 3hr 51min reality jolt. Never again, one suspects, will he allow himself to play as frivolously as he did against Marcos Baghdatis in the fourth round of Wimbledon last year and against Nikolay Davydenko at the same stage at the US Open.

Murray suspected that playing the Spaniard — especially over five sets — would teach him more about himself than any other match he has played and he was accurate in that assessment.

Having taken the first set on a tie-break with a couple of aces backed up by two successful line-call challenges, Murray should have been 2-0 up in the second after having three break points — the first wasted with a lashed forehand — with Nadal beginning to look creaky.

Although Murray did eventually break to lead 4-1, an earlier momentum shift could have made all the difference, for he promptly lost his serve twice, then the set.

He was holding his right side by now and two double faults in the third game of the third set hastened a break. Usually, in those circumstances, Nadal sprints from view, but with his gliding forehand approaches, his ability to shift gears — often three times or more in the space of one rally — plus his hugely effective serve and his inner belief, Murray, saving two further break points in the ninth game, pounced in the next to claim the set.

Nowhere near done, Murray led 30-0 on Nadal's serve in the second game of the fourth set. He was 40-0 up in the fourth — indeed, he had five break points in that game — but missed a great opportunity on the second of them. At the end of a rally that Nadal had dominated, Murray produced a stunning cross-court backhand that was called out, but which television replays showed was good. Had Murray challenged the call, he would have won the point and the game, and possibly established an irreversible shift of emphasis.

The fifth set — Nadal has not lost one of those in a grand-slam tournament since his defeat by Lleyton Hewitt at the same stage two years ago — was quite a journey. The Spaniard saved break points in his first two service games, having snared the Scot's serve with a couple of improbable forehand winners, and by then, for all that Murray's flesh and spirit were willing, Nadal's will saw him home.

In the quarter-finals he will play the No 10 seed, Fernando González, who beat James Blake, the No 5, 7-5, 6-4, 7-6.

Murray epic is talk of the tournament

Neil Harman

Published at 12:00AM, January 24 2007

Andy Murray went go-karting yesterday as the Australian Open suffered a day of anticlimax after the match everyone wanted to talk about. Yes, Serena Williams reached the semi-finals when perhaps she should have been beaten; yes, Andy Roddick gave himself a fillip by thrashing his best friend; yes, Roger Federer was buffeted by the winds and did not play well and won. These were mere incidentals.

No match on day nine of the tournament came close to matching the final instalment of day eight, Murray's epic encounter with Rafael Nadal. It will take a very good match to beat it.

Roddick against Federer tomorrow should come close, what with Roddick's bravura effort in the US Open final in September, the fact that he had match points at the Masters Cup in Shanghai and beat the world No 1 a week ago in a warm-up event in Kooyong.

Roddick countered then that he should not get big-headed because there would be bigger fish to fry and, after he fried Mardy Fish, once a room-mate of his, in three sets of 29 minutes in the Rod Laver Arena, the No 6 seed realised that he had set himself a defining test of his talents in the third week of the season.

He has been in a more settled mood since Jimmy Connors, his coach, arrived here four days ago, having been given time and space to recover from the death of Gloria, his mother. "I can't sit back and let him [Federer] create," Roddick said. "Whatever I do, if it doesn't work I'm sure all you smart people will say I should have done the opposite."

Murray shines in dull days

Andy Murray is young and physically underdeveloped, but one cannot argue with suggestions that he is now British sport's brightest star

Published: 28 January 2007

When it was seriously suggested last week that Andy Murray is now British sport's brightest star, a sense of embarrassment lurked in the realisation that the claim could not be instantly ridiculed. In other times the natural impulse would have been to dismiss as wildly premature and excessive such celebration of a 19-year-old tennis player who has yet to progress beyond the fourth round of a Grand Slam tournament.

But disdainful reaction cannot survive a moment's thought or the merest glance at the odds attached by the bookmakers William Hill to the likely contenders for the BBC Sports Personality of the Year award in 2007. Murray is 3-1 favourite and the rival closest to him in the betting is priced at 12-1. That distinction belongs to Jenson Button, a Formula One driver whose record shows a single grand prix win from 118 starts.

Nobody was in any danger of imagining we were in the midst of a golden age of sporting achievement for this country but perhaps we have even more reason to be modest than we appreciated. Plainly Murray justifies the hopes that are gathering around him. The best-qualified judges are convinced he will be a fearsome problem for any opponent once physical maturity enables him to extract full value from a burning combative spirit and a game that marries an often deceptive power with an arsenal rich in variety, invention and refinement of touch. Yet the remarkable impact of his fledgling career on the national consciousness clearly reflects not only almost three-quarters of a century of disappointments in men's tennis but the contemporary inadequacy of British performances across a wide range of sports. The failures of others far removed from his professional milieu are piling on to the boy from Dunblane a worryingly heavy load of expectation.

Evidence that he is already a standard-bearer in the public mind was provided by the shrinking of his odds in that Hill's list during the Australian Open. At the start of the action in Melbourne, his chances of collecting this year's BBC award were rated at 10-1 and it was understandable that his price should be halved under the pressure of the punters' response to the extraordinary combination of brilliance and grit he displayed through five electrifying sets before being denied a place in the quarter-finals by Rafael Nadal, who is at No 2 in the world rankings.

What was surprising was how wagering support for Murray was sustained long after the thrill created by his minor epic with Nadal had given way to shock over the Spaniard's brusque ejection from the tournament at the hands of Fernando Gonzalez of Chile (albeit to an

accompaniment of medical bulletins concerning an injury that restricted Nadal's mobility). The 5-1 about Murray swiftly became 3-1, leaving Button far adrift in double-digit territory, with Paula Radcliffe next at 14-1 and the boxers Ricky Hatton and Joe Calzaghe on 16s along with Wayne Rooney and the promising if recently wayward racing driver Lewis Hamilton.

Though neither the Beeb's end-of-the-year poll nor the bookies' calculations of its probable outcome could ever be regarded as a reliable guide to true merit, they offer a basis for debate. And whatever terms of judgment are applied it is difficult to find many British performers in any game or competitive discipline whose deeds force the Murray lobbyists into drastic adjustment of their perspective. Both rugby and cricket must for the present be spared scrutiny to avoid mocking the afflicted. In football, speculation about the player of the year votes that will soon be due is largely concentrated on an attacker from the Ivory Coast, Didier Drogba, and another from Portugal, Cristiano Ronaldo, although admiration for Paul Scholes's perennial excellence occasionally thrusts itself into the argument. Rooney in last night's dazzling form is a ready-made hero of the masses but he has had an inconsistent season.

British golfers maintained an impressive capacity for flourishing in a team environment with their contributions to the latest Ryder Cup victory last September but individually they are defined by the absence of European names from the roll of major winners since Paul Lawrie came through in a dramatically dishevelled Open at Carnoustie in 1999.

In athletics, there are no doubt exceptional talents plugging away quietly but hints that we are about to hail a new Sebastian Coe, Steve Ovett or Daley Thompson are hard to discern, and the great Radcliffe's most glorious feats are probably behind her. Calzaghe and Hatton are unbeaten and utterly outstanding but they, too, may be past their peaks, and boxers nowadays seldom enthral the nation as they once did. Britain's glittering tradition of producing champion drivers has withered.

Among jockeys, there was never going to be anyone comparable to Lester Piggott, but where is the Brit equivalent of Willie Carson? Most experts' choice of the best handful of Flat riders to have competed regularly on English courses in recent seasons would consist of four Irishmen and an Italian, and over jumps two more Irishmen, Tony McCoy and Ruby Walsh, have emerged as unchallengeably supreme.

In all kinds of sporting arenas, feats of derring-do by the British are sufficiently rare these days to make the limited accomplishments of Andy Murray a focus for unbridled enthusiasm. But if his fellow countrymen cannot supply a sobering bench-mark, an incomparable tennis genius from Switzerland surely will.

Murray back as the man in possession

Simon Cambers in San Jose, California

Published at 12:00AM, February 13 2007

Twelve months ago, Andy Murray arrived here as a confident young man with bundles of talent but with little concrete evidence that he would be able to match his ambition with titles. A year on and the tennis world is a different place for the Scot, who begins the defence of his SAP Open crown tonight knowing that he is capable of beating the best.

Back-to-back wins over two former world No 1s, Andy Roddick and Lleyton Hewitt, gave him his maiden ATP Tour title here last year and prompted John McEnroe to say that it was only a matter of time before Murray would break into the top 20. The three-times Wimbledon champion was right; Murray enters the tournament at a career-high ranking of No 13 and with the world seemingly at his feet.

The frail-looking teenager who upset the favourites at the HP Pavilion this time last year has been replaced by a lean, strong, ultra-confident 19-year-old who stands on the verge of a place in the top ten.

Indeed, Murray believes that he has what it takes to get to the top, especially after taking Rafael Nadal, the world No 2 from Spain, to five sets in the fourth round of the Australian Open last month. "It was probably the best I have ever played, probably better than when I beat [Roger] Federer [the world No 1] last year [in Cincinnati]," Murray said. "I learnt that I could hit a lot harder than I thought I could, consistently."

A lot of the credit for that has to go to Brad Gilbert, his coach, who has helped Murray to add power to his game and to improve his fitness to a level where it is now considered a strength.

In reaching the last 16 at Wimbledon, the US Open and the Australian Open in the past seven months, Murray is finding consistency to go with the great days, such as the one in Cincinnati in August when he became only the second man, after Nadal, to beat Federer in 2006. Such is the transformation that in San Jose, where last year you would have been hard pushed to find anyone who knew who Murray was, he has been prominent in the promotion for television coverage of the tournament.

The Scot opens his campaign against Kevin Kim, the world No 125 from the United States, who has won only once this year. His path looks relatively trouble-free through to a possible semi-final against Roddick in what would be a repeat of last year's clash at the same stage, a match that Murray won in straight sets.

Roddick, who reached the semi-finals in Australia, is the No 1 seed here, while the field is bolstered by the presence of James Blake, the world No 6, and Marat Safin, the former world No 1 from Russia.

Murray will be boosted by the presence of his brother, Jamie, who partners Eric Butorac, of the US, in the doubles.

The British challenge got off to a fine start last night when James Auckland, Britain's highest-ranked doubles player at No 61, partnered Stephen Huss, of Australia, to a surprise 7-6, 6-1 win over Frantisek Cermak and Jaroslav Levinsky, the No 1 seeds from the Czech Republic.

Murray uses strongarm tactics to open defence in champion style

Simon Cambers in San Jose, California

Published at 12:00AM, February 15 2007

It is no secret that Andy Murray has been working hard to improve his strength. But when the radar gun flashed up 145mph in his first-round match at the SAP Open on Tuesday night, even the Scot allowed himself a smile.

“I’ve been working on my serve a lot,” he said after opening the defence of his title with an impressive 6-3, 6-1 victory over Kevin Kim, the world No 108 from the United States. “I hit a 145mph one, but I do think the gun is a little bit quick. That serve was probably about a 140. I have hit a 138 before, but I would be interested to see what Andy [Roddick] hits.”

Murray and Brad Gilbert, his coach, worked hard in the gym in the short off-season, but even Gilbert admitted his surprise at the speed of his charge’s serve. “We watched the first six games of [Marat] Safin’s match and [Scott] Oud-sema hit a 140,” he said. “Andy said to me he was going to hit a 140 and then he hit 145 in the first game. The hardest serve I have seen him hit was 137, but that gun tonight was juiced. It was on steroids.”

Gilbert has been working on improving Murray’s core strength through gym work, making him stronger on the run and in longer rallies. “He is not really about one-off maximum lifts,” Gilbert said. “But he is lifting good weights.

“It’s about trying to make him more aggressive. Andy has great defensive qualities and he moves unbelievably well, like a gazelle. He is a great returner, but we need to add something and are trying to make him more offensive. At 19, you want to grow into your game.”

On the court where his meteoric rise up the rankings to his present position of No 13 began 12 months ago — when he beat two former world No 1s in Roddick and Lleyton Hewitt, of Australia, to win his first ATP Tour title — Murray looked at home.

Murray flashed 11 aces past Kim and the only time the Scot had anything to worry about came in the seventh game of the opening set, when a line judge at the other end of the court called two consecutive foot-faults against him for crossing the centre line.

“I’ve never had that call in my life,” a bemused Murray said. “I’ve been foot-faulted, but only on the baseline, not on that part of the court. I even adjusted my feet after the first one and then she called the second. It was a little bit strange.”

Murray was broken in that game, but after serving out at the second time of asking, he ripped through the second set with a series of winners to clinch a victory that never looked in doubt, even if he described the court as 40 per cent faster than a year ago.

It may only be six months since Gilbert agreed to become Murray's coach, but there is something in the 19-year-old's gait that suggests he is unlikely to suffer the kind of surprise defeats to which British fans have become so accustomed from the likes of Tim Henman and Greg Rusedski in recent years. He stands on the verge of the world's top ten — which Gilbert said was the immediate aim — and the way that he played against Rafael Nadal, the world No 2 from Spain, in their classic five-set encounter in the last 16 of the Australian Open last month has flicked a switch.

"I definitely realised something that night that I didn't know before," Murray said. "I feel like I am more of a complete player. I was hitting the ball really hard. Everybody's known that I could change the pace and mix it up, but I showed I can play serve and volley and play aggressively. I served and volleyed two or three times tonight and won every point. It's something I have been working on because I want to use it more in matches when I am not playing my best."

So relaxed was Murray after his victory over Kim — he was due to play Kristian Pless, of Denmark, in the second round last night — that he was more than happy to play second fiddle to his brother, Jamie, who celebrated his 21st birthday on Tuesday.

Jamie, who is partnering Eric Butorac, of the US, in the doubles here, was presented with a birthday cake on court immediately after his brother's win.

"He was pretty chuffed that he can drink legally in the US now," Murray said. "He was looking forward to that. I feel bad because I didn't get him a present. I was trying to think of something, but I will have to get him something nice now."

Net gains

Leon Smith, the new men's under16s head coach at the LTA and a former coach to Andy Murray, suggests five ways to work towards having a world-class serve

1 Correct grip In order to produce sufficient wrist action and forearm rotation, players need to learn to serve with the "chopper" or continental grip. To do this, place the heel of the hand on the top edge of the grip. With practice, this grip will allow for far greater racket acceleration

2 Leg stance/base Players need to adopt a comfortable base with the legs approximately shoulder-width apart, the front foot pointing roughly at the net post and the back foot perpendicular to the front foot. This comfortable starting base provides excellent balance and allows players to bend the knees slightly, which produces the energy required for a powerful leg drive upwards to the contact point

3 Ball toss Generally you want to toss the ball slightly in front of the baseline and approximately 10-12 inches above the point of contact, allowing forward transfer of weight, which will give more power

4 Develop a fast arm A large percentage of power in serving is generated through the speed of the arm. This is achieved with forearm extension, upper-arm internal rotation and wrist snap. Players need to practise lots of ball-throwing exercises and develop good strength and range of movement in their upper arm to help to develop arm speed

Murray returns in style

The rising young Scot is attacking the serve as well as anybody in the world, establishing himself as top returner at the start of 2007

Barry Flatman

Published: 18 February 2007

Throughout the hours Brad Gilbert has spent honing the talents of Andy Murray on the practice court, the loquacious American coach has always avoided overusing one phrase: "Andre used to do it this way."

In the eight years Gilbert spent guiding Andre Agassi to six Grand Slam titles, he always appreciated that he was dealing with the best returner of the serve at that time and arguably the most accomplished the game has known. Jimmy Connors, Jean Borotra and Don Budge would lead the argument, but wondrous hand-eye coordination, lightning-fast reflexes and a sense of anticipation that seemed superhuman made Agassi the master when facing the serve. And he established his reputation in an era when power had never been more prevalent.

Long before the Lawn Tennis Association dangled a £700,000 -a-year salary in front of him, Gilbert and many others realised Murray was blessed with some of the attributes that made Agassi a legend. Admittedly, the young Scot was a long way from physical maturity, and distinct aspects of negativity had to be wiped from his mind. But the potential was there.

Now, with Agassi almost five months into retirement, Lleyton Hewitt appearing to have lost the fire that made him world No 1 and even the workaholic Nikolay Davydenko suffering a dip in form, Murray is establishing himself as the top returner at the start of 2007.

Since his junior days he has made no secret of the fact that his game is based around the ability to negate the advantage of his opponent's serve. He has never been afraid to step in from the baseline to attack, and the poise of his groundstrokes has allowed him to produce the most fluid of returns. Now he has worked specifically on core strength, he has more options and, to use an Agassi-ism, when the ball is aimed within his "wheelhouse", his opponent had better look out.

Last year was Murray's first complete experience of the ATP Tour and all its rigours. Impressively, he figured prominently in the year-ending returning statistics, with third place in return games won and points won receiving both first and second serves, but Gilbert has always been adamant that the past is irrelevant and the only thing that matters is the future.

Ironically, most of the focus on Murray's game this year has been centred on his serve and the way his strengthened body is able to inflict more initial power on his opponent. Throughout his passage to the Australian Open's fourth round there was abundant evidence that the work in the Golden State Warriors weight room had added muscle to augment the touch and guile that has

always been apparent. (Much to his amazement, the service speed gun registered a 145mph bullet during his opening match at the SAP Open in San Jose last week. However, it transpired that the equipment was not properly calibrated.)

The added strength has augmented Murray's already impressive return and he has no reason to fear any opponent's delivery. As he admitted last week, he does not want to become overly muscled. "I think [Roger] Federer is a good person for me to look up to in terms of physique," he adds. "He has big legs like me and was thin in his upper body when he was younger. I just want to put on eight or nine pounds and then I will be more than happy with my weight."

Murray, who moved through to the semi-finals in defence of the SAP Open title he won last year with a 4-6 6-3 7-6 victory over experienced Korean seventh seed Hyung-Taik Lee yesterday, rightly says mobility is far more important than brute strength in today's game. "Just because you have bulk doesn't necessarily make you more efficient," he says. "If that was the case, I wouldn't be able to serve harder than [Rafael] Nadal. It also depends how you determine strength. Is it how long you can last? How hard you can hit the ball? How big you can serve?"

The answer, as Murray knows, is a combination of all three and many other aspects besides. Federer is the mark to which all other players must aspire. The real strength his game is that he excels in all areas. Whenever Pete Sampras strode on to any surface other than clay it was the same, but history suggests that those who rely predominantly on the crashing big serve do not stockpile Grand Slam titles.

Though undeniably talented, Goran Ivanisevic had to wait until that surreal Wimbledon of 2001 to win his prize. Andy Roddick seems to be another serial runner-up, with only the US Open title of 2003. Compare those records to Agassi (eight Grand Slam titles on all surfaces) and Connors (eight). Evidence seems to suggest that a supreme return of serve is more likely to reap dividends.

Murray shows measured calm to reach final

Barry Flatman, Sunday Times Tennis Correspondent

Published at 10:51AM, February 18 2007

If anyone was still in any doubt whether Andy Murray yet merited a place amongst the elite of men's tennis, the measured calm of the 19-year-old's win over Andy Roddick to reach the final of the SAP Open in San Jose was proof.

A year ago at the same stage Murray took Roddick by surprise en route to his first ever ATP title. This time the big serving world No 4 knew exactly what to expect and ultimately found himself powerless to stop Murray marching to a 7-6, 6-4 victory and a place in the final against Ivo Karlovic, the 6ft 10ins Croatian giant.

Apart from one game in the first set when Murray squandered what appeared to be a valuable break of serve the Scottish teenager exuded class and poise. There were no histrionics, not a single sign of immaturity. Instead he faced up to everything Roddick could throw at him and came away with one the most accomplished victories of his career that stands favourably alongside last year's Cincinnati win over Roger Federer.

Make no mistake about it; Roddick is a far more assured player than he was this time last year or at last summer's Wimbledon when Murray pitched him out of the third round in three sets. The mentoring of Jimmy Connors has rejuvenated his self belief and added new aspects to his game but Murray, in collaboration with Roddick's former coach Brad Gilbert, has mastered the art of formulating a game plan and once again it paid off in this one hour and 32 minutes long triumph in the HP Pavilion.

"He has that special kind of something that gets him through matches," Roddick, who won the San Jose title in 2004 and 2005, said. "He came straight out and started winning straight away. That always the key and a pretty decent indicator. If a guy is going to win matches at the age of 18 then you know he's going to be around the tour for a while."

Murray's returning is the stand out aspect of his game but he served better than Roddick, hitting 14 aces compared to the American's nine. And at times he completely mastered the Roddick delivery, winning an astounding 76 per cent of the points on his opponent's second serve.

"He handles pace well," Roddick said. "He can hit passing shots from any position. He's great at playing defence from tough positions. He can move well and even when he's on the run he's able to come up with something."

There was no sign of fatigue after Murray's late night three set win over Korea's Hyung-Taik Lee in the quarter-final and the Scot was the first to win a break point although Roddick, who had endured a bad tempered encounter with fellow American Vince Spadea, came up with a timely ace to avert the danger.

Both men had opportunities but Murray was the first to strike with a break of serve. First he swept an imperious backhand crosscourt that gave Roddick no chance, then he directed the most direct of forehand passing shots leaving his opponent marooned in midcourt as the ball fell just inside the angle of the baseline and sideline.

It should have opened the door for Murray but he allowed his concentration to momentarily waver with an alarmingly slack game. A simple backhand volley thudded in the net before another straight forward shot went wide to bring Roddick back into contention and the first set extended to a tie-break.

Both men began with double faults and errors proliferated before an 142mph ace from Roddick flew out wide to give him the first of two set points. Murray reacted admirably with two winners before taking the upper hand with a series of set points. Two went to waste before he came up with a backhand cross court that took a fortuitous net cord to leave Roddick shaking his head.

Roddick's frustration grew in the second set but Murray never allowed himself to become flustered. The Scot was presented with just one break point but that was enough and his assertive play forced Roddick into volleying a backhand into the net.

Try as the top seed might to force his way back, Murray stood firm and came up with a stunning backhand half volley to fend off the only break point opportunity he allowed during the set. Serving out for the match, he first crashed a 14th ace and moved to 40-love before moving through to the fifth final of his young career with another forehand that flicked the net-cord.

"Apart from the tie-break when obviously he had a couple of set points, I felt in control," Murray said. "I returned well, I passed well and got into a lot of his service games. Apart from one game in the first set I think I played a good match.

"Last year was my first really big win against a top five player. Since then I think I'm maybe 6-3 up against top five players so this result is really not too much of a shock." Murray must now face up to a first ever meeting with Karlovic knowing his 103rd ranked opponent has already struck 80 aces in the tournament.

To complete an excellent day for the Murray family, 21-year-old elder brother Jamie reached the doubles final in partnership with American Eric Butorac. After winning last week's Challenger event in Dallas, he beat the pairing of Scott Lipsky and David Martin 6-4, 7-6 and now meet fourth seeds Chris Haggard, of South Africa, and Rainer Schuettler, of Germany.

Murray graduates from land of promises - delivering is his new modus operandi

Simon Barnes, Chief Sports Writer

Published at 12:00AM, February 20 2007

Andy Murray is not a promising young man. Not any longer. That is the meaning of his achievement in winning the SAP Open in San Jose. He has started to become a man of substance, a person of achievement. In winning, in retaining the title, he has left that warm, cosy corner of the world that we make for young people we call promising.

To be a promising young man is one of the most seductive roles that life has to offer. You are cherished and made much of, and yet you don't actually have to do anything. You just have to gather about you enough small triumphs to maintain the role, while your every failure is generously accepted as part of the learning process. An essential step on the ladder that will carry you inevitably to the top — in time, all in good time.

Meet Bill Truscott, from Anthony Powell's *A Dance to the Music of Time*: "The chief question still seemed to be how best his brilliance should be employed. To say that he could not make up his mind whether to become in due course prime minister or a great poet might sound exaggerated (though Short had so described Truscott's dilemma), but in general he was at any rate sufficiently highly regarded in the university . . . to make him appear a fascinating and almost alarming figure." Truscott ends up working for the Coal Board.

Dreadful thing, promise. Cyril Connolly set himself up as the world expert on the subject and wrote that "whom the gods wish to destroy, they first call promising". But the gods are not as hidebound as Connolly thinks. Many of the greats were also alarmingly promising alarmingly young; in sport, in many other walks of life. Pelé and Bradman were promising, Sampras and Perry were promising. They all ended up delivering.

And so it has happened that Murray has just started on a new phase of his career, that of a delivering young man. It is a massive step forward, one that requires a complete change of world view. It involves a sense of responsibility for one's own actions, a willingness to see oneself as a grown-up. In sport, that means beating the people you are supposed to beat. It means that days of the glorious inspired fluke are over. Victory is no longer a bonus, it is now a basic requirement.

Murray's progress to this title has shown, above all things, a growing sense of authority. He has demonstrated a belief that he has the right to win big tennis matches. Victory is no longer a wild dream and pinch him to see if he is awake. It has become a matter of routine. It wasn't easy, either, in San Jose. He had to win more than one match the difficult way, the way that tests stamina and will as well as ability.

All of which shows that Murray has stepped outside the comfortable place we reserve for people of promise, that place where we put people without asking very much of them. Call it the Theo Walcott Zone, for the 17-year-old who was recruited into England's World Cup squad on a wild whim of the head coach, Sven-Göran Eriksson, and then used as a mascot, a mendacious tribute to Eriksson's adventurousness.

But Murray has gone beyond that zone. A few weeks ago, his defeat by Rafael Nadal in the Australian Open had all the look of a promising young man, a youngster prepared to look good against the best without feeling the need for actual victory. Promise, without the need to deliver. Defeated in five sets, a hero.

But the great thing is that Murray was not content with that thrillingly comfortable role. He has moved beyond promise and elevated himself to the level of contender. A great deal more is expected of him as a result. Life will, at once, become very much less comfortable. The question of where he will go from here is anybody's guess. He could get stuck at this new level or continue to move onwards and upwards. Injury might change everything in a single moment.

We don't know. But the important thing that happened in San Jose was that Murray left the inner Bill Truscott behind. He has taken the harder and more difficult road, the one that does not lead to the Coal Board. The way he plays, he is more likely to be a prime minister than Poet Laureate, but what matters is that he has left promise behind. The scalp-taker now becomes a scalp himself. Those who beat him will boast about it. He will be talked up as a real factor in Paris, Wimbledon and New York. He has gone into that bleaker and uglier place where losing really matters. Making promises is easy; Murray has now started keeping them.

Murray suffers misery in Memphis

Andy Roddick gets his revenge on the British number one with a 6-3 7-6 win in the Memphis semi-final
Barry Flatman

Published: 25 February 2007

Coming to grips with the adult world is an educational time for any teenager and Andy Murray was painfully taught the lesson that after intimidating the world's most forceful tennis player, he cannot afford even a moment's slackness.

Murray effectively played no more than a handful of inattentive points as he again faced up to Andy Roddick in a semi-final, just seven days after producing arguably the most resolute performance of his young career. But whereas San Jose was a story of Scottish dominance, the very different setting of Memphis produced a harsh but understandable dose of the blues yesterday.

And while Murray's elder brother Jamie today bids to win a second successive title in the doubles, the younger of the Dunblane duo will be forced to play the uncomfortable role of supporting spectator, mindful that he produced sufficient chances to record a fourth win over Roddick in five meetings.

As it is, the top-seeded American will step onto the blue court of the Memphis Racquet Club and try to reclaim the title he won in 2002 and end any aspirations Germany's Tommy Haas has of defending the prize he won a year ago. Both men have progressed to the final without dropping a set.

Roddick will know he was more than a little fortunate to overcome Murray 6-3 7-6 after surviving a set point that would have squared the match and then coming from behind in the deciding tie-break. It was the first time the world No 4 had got the better of his Scottish opponent in a tie-break and the look on his face after crashing a final 16th ace to claim the win suggested more relief than delight. Roddick was intent on revenge against the 19-year-old and initially seemed to have his target sharply in his sights. Jimmy Connors stayed at home in California but clearly telephone conversations between mentor and performer had formulated a game plan and execution was paramount in the Roddick mind.

Murray looked sluggish. A night earlier he was bristling with sharpness to beat Austria's Stefan Koubek but the mood had clearly dissipated and a succession of errors allowed Roddick to register an immediate break of serve. There was a measured approach to Roddick's play. He was outmanoeuvring Murray from the back of the court by the use of placement as much as power and his serving was meticulous with only three points dropped during the entire first set. Certainly it looked as though mental fatigue rather than any physical shortcomings were affecting British hopes.

However, impetuosity has long been a problem for Roddick and with the first set won, he began to rush in an apparent bid to tie up victory. After braving another break point in the opening game of the second set and serving up a demoralising three double-faults, Murray sensed a chance and began to worry his opponent.

He swept those glorious passing shots that are becoming his trademark, began to get a better read on the Roddick serve and moved to one break point, only to have a thudding ace fly past him straight down the middle of court. But two games later Murray broke through, exposing Roddick for attempting to come in for a volley after gaining insufficient depth on the approach.

Murray walked out to serve for the set at 5-3 but then produced the sort of game that should give him nightmares for months. A couple of calamitous errors allowed Roddick three break points and only two were needed. Brad Gilbert shook his head, Murray barked angrily in his coach's direction and Roddick tugged at his baseball cap, appreciating his good fortune.

Still he had to brave a set point after crashing four aces in one game, a sliding delivery off a second-serve winner forcing Murray to hit a return into the net, but after falling to a 4-1 deficit in the tie-break Roddick proved his quality by winning the match's last six points.

But as one Murray cursed his performance, another could savour triumph as Jamie won through to his second doubles final in as many weeks. Again partnering Eric Butorac, he triumphed 5-7 7-6 12-10 against former Australian Open champion Thomas Johansson and Frenchman Julien Benneteau.

Murray rises to occasion despite the heat and a lack of sleep

Neil Harman, Tennis Correspondent in Indian Wells, California

Published at 12:00AM, March 12 2007

They were not especially Andy Murray's conditions — he lost an hour's sleep because, such is California's energy shortage, the state brought daylight savings forward three weeks and, with malicious timing, there is near record-breaking heat in the desert for this time of year. Notwithstanding such inconveniences, the British No 1 could not have appeared much cooler as the first Masters tournament of the year began to take shape.

Murray's 6-3, 6-3 victory over Wesley Moodie of South Africa was the equivalent of a serious workout, nothing in it to carp about, all secure and steady, a particularly impressive example of getting the job done against a player who wore sunglasses, such was the intensity of the sun's glare. Murray's game was just as bright.

When the pair met on grass three years ago in a Challenger in Manchester, Murray won for the loss of five games and this against one of the more formidable serve and volley players in the contemporary game. So the 6ft 5in Moodie will have known what to expect, only Murray's game is chalk and cheese from when he was 17 years of age.

These are heady days for the Scot, No 14 in the world rankings and drawing just as many photographers to practice sessions as Roger Federer and Rafael Nadal. And it is not only his hairstyle they come to capture. Everywhere you go in the sport, there is a growing sense that Murray's rise through the ranks is irresistible, a young man with a secure take on himself and his place in the game.

You know you are making an impression on the tennis world when you begin to have an influence over the scheduling at events of this nature. Murray had begun to get a bit miffed that he was playing so many first matches in the United States, so that it would suit British television preferences. Brad Gilbert, his insomniac of a coach, might not worry what time of the day he got going, but Murray is much better when he has had a chance to rub all the sleep from his eyes.

If Moodie's performance lacked belief, it is no surprise. Murray was so secure from the back of the court, the South African sensed early on that to penetrate the Scot's defences he would be forced to risk all at the net, and on a day as oppressively warm as yesterday, he suffered for being moved too many times out of his comfort zone. In the end, Murray was simply picking him off.

It was not going to be the 19-year-old's last appearance on the courts yesterday, for he was scheduled to partner Tim Henman in the doubles against Juan Ignacio Chela and Sebastian

Preito, of Argentina, a match that would be avidly followed by John Lloyd, the Great Britain Davis Cup captain, more than most.

A tennis coach in possession of a media badge congratulated Nadal for uncorking a serve of 122 mph yesterday — the conclusion being that the Spaniard's powers were in commendable shape. The statistics sheets for the Sony Ericsson WTA Tour then landed and it was revealed that Brenda Schultz-McCarthy, a 36-year-old, had nailed one at 126 mph, so perhaps Nadal needs to keep working on that muscle definition.

Nadal may have collected five titles last year and beaten Federer four times in the process, but winning 10 of 14 matches this year as against Federer's 12 of 12 (before the world No 1 started his campaign this morning against Guillermo Cañas, of Argentina, a lucky loser from qualifying) is regarded as a false start.

Murray looks real deal as he eases past Davydenko

Neil Harman, Tennis Correspondent in Indian Wells, California

Published at 12:00AM, March 15 2007

Andy Murray did not win his seventeenth match of 2006 until the third round of Wimbledon. On his debut on a different Centre Court yesterday, the 19-year-old secured a berth in the quarter-finals of the Pacific Life Open with his eighteenth victory of the season — a further enhancement of the big-match nous that has marked his progress from prodigy to the real deal.

Murray, the No 13 seed here, defeated Nikolay Davydenko, of Russia, 7-6, 6-4, no mean feat in the conditions, just the kind of scorching sky-blue, crystal-clear day that is the norm in these parts in March. For Murray at the moment, the sky seems a permanent shade of blue. He will play Tommy Haas, of Germany, or Fernando Gonz?lez, of Chile, who were due to play in the early hours of this morning, for a place in the last four.

A year ago, with his partnership with Mark Petchey, his coach, showing the first signs of creaking, which would lead to their break-up a month later, Murray lost in the second round to Davydenko, who was preparing to embark on a spectacular year, reaching No 3 in the world and the Masters Cup in Shanghai.

Fast-forward and we are in a different world, of Murray nudging the top ten, unfazed by Davydenko's adroit court coverage, his remarkable timing off the ground and instinct for half an opening. Yesterday, it was the British No 1 who displayed all these things, and more besides, although it took him a lot longer than he would have wanted to clinch the first set, which should not have necessitated a tie-break.

It was evident that Murray's eye was in from the first point. In the midst of a baseline rally, what appeared from far away in the press seats as a Davydenko winner was challenged by the Scot. It had to be the first time in Hawk-Eye's history that its computers were required so soon in proceedings, but Murray was right to ask for a second opinion because the ball had missed the sidelines. Strange then, that he should lose his serve.

The break back came in the fourth game, when Davydenko netted what should have been a routine backhand. Games proceeded with serve until the tenth, when Davydenko found himself 40-0 down, the last point secured when Murray tossed up three successive lobs from five yards behind the baseline and the Russian scythed the last of them into the net. Davydenko saved each of those set points and one more, then took advantage of Murray's brief letdown by snatching serve again. A fourth seed ought to have turned the screw but Davydenko played a clumsy game to take it to a tie-break that Murray grabbed, serving belligerently just when it was required.

It is important when playing Davydenko never to give him the same ball twice and Murray's opening to the second set was perfect in that regard, a couple of looping backhands, a few three-quarter-paced balls down the middle, then a flick of the wrist and Davydenko was having to throw out his racket in a forlorn attempt at retrieval. A break in the first game was to prove decisive with a 136mph serve sealing victory.

Andy Roddick has not been to the final of this championship in four attempts, but there is a mood about him that suggests that the Americans might have something to cheer from what has otherwise been a dismal few days. Roddick reached the last eight with a 7-6, 6-3 victory over Richard Gasquet, of France, and looks in fabulous form.

Comment: Murray relishes life in the spotlight

Neil Harman, Tennis Correspondent in Indian Wells, California

Published at 12:00AM, March 15 2007

Three victories in straight sets, more successes in two and a half months than he managed in the first half of last year, still in the doubles with his new best friend, Tim Henman, successfully challenging on the first point of a match, the American fans loving every minute of him - this is Andy Murray's moment and he is thriving upon it.

Murray's 7-6, 6-4 victory over Nikolay Davydenko, the fourth seed from Russia, in the Pacific Life Open on Wednesday sends him into the quarter-finals against either Tommy Haas, of Germany, or Fernando Gonzalez, the Australian Open finalist from Chile. It is spectacularly silly to get too far ahead of oneself in this game, but there is every reason to be confident about the Scot's prospects of being inside the world's top ten within the next couple of months.

The 19-year-old could hardly be more relaxed if they replaced his stiff-backed chair at changeovers with a hammock. He is settled when he comes to the United States, he enjoys the vibes, the people, the attitude, the free and easy approach to life and living.

At the end of his practice on Wednesday, he and Brad Gilbert, his coach, had a contest to see who could hit a ball highest into the bleachers. Hard to imagine trying that at Wimbledon, even on the practice courts.

Tactically, Murray was spot-on against Davydenko, who would love to be fed ball after ball back at him at the same tempo. Instead, Murray used his vast repertoire, changing the pace, offering slice and then soft shots, throwing in the occasional howitzer, which frustrated and fooled the Russian, who prefers the metronomic approach. Davydenko often runs the life out of opponents who think they can out-rally him.

Murray was right to say that the loss of Roger Federer in the second round of the tournament would have no impact on him. The only time he could have played Federer was in the final, his section is littered with exceptional players anyway, so why worry? But there is a spring in the step of everyone left in this fabulous event, Rafael Nadal is looking awesome, Andy Roddick has a fixed stare of intent, Gonzalez and Haas are approaching their best form, Novak Djokovic is another adolescent on the rise. But Murray is right in there with them. Having the time of his life.

Rejuvenated Haas sizes up surging force of Murray

Neil Harman, Tennis Correspondent in Indian Wells, California

Published at 12:00AM, March 16 2007

Tommy Haas will be 29 in three weeks' time, a player who has promised so much for so long and now, in the autumn of his career, may be about to deliver on that promise. First, though, he has to figure out Andy Murray.

The most eye-catching of the quarter-finals at the Pacific Life Open today pits the German who has had the finest start of his 11 years on the ATP Tour against Murray, fast becoming the talk of the desert. They may not have that much in common in terms of approach to the game — Haas is all attacking verve and hyperactivity, Murray feeds off such opposition — but together they have rattled off some very decent wins in 2007.

Haas reached the semi-finals of the Australian Open for the second time before losing to Fernando Gonzalez, of Chile, a result that he turned dramatically on its head with a 6-3, 6-2

victory in the fourth round here. Murray moves remorselessly on, churning out big wins, making statements, gathering supporters. Both share an undisguised glee at shouting at their coaches.

“I see a little bit of myself in him,” Haas said. “He’s yelling a couple of negative words towards the box — it’s good to see I’m not the only one. He competes and he wants to win and he knows where the ball is coming to most of the time. Sometimes, he will walk around like he can’t go on any more and touches himself on the back or the leg, you think he’s going to retire any second.

“But at the same time, he moves around so well. He’s got great touch and competes hard, even though he lets his emotions out, which I kind of like.”

To reach his second Masters Series semi-final, Murray will have to sustain against the world No 9 the form he showed in beating Nikolay Davydenko, the Russian world No 4. To the British No 1, it comes down to the ability to play the big points better than his opponent, something that has marked out the greats down the years. “Think of Roddick pulling out those big serves when he was No 1, or Sampras hitting second-serve aces,” Murray said. “And now I have the physical strength to stay with these players.”

Murray, in tandem with Tim Henman, was beaten 6-3, 6-4 in the quarter-finals by Jonas Bjorkman and Max Mirnyi, the No 1 doubles seeds.

Murray’s remarkable run continues

Neil Harman, Times Tennis correspondent, Indian Wells, California

Published at 12:07PM, March 17 2007

There has to come a time - and we hope it never happens - when watching Andy Murray playing tennis will be a mundane, straightforward, feet up, cigar-smoking, experience. You know how it might be, a few simple 6-2, 6-2s, with no fuss, no bother, done and dusted, home and hosed. Time for dinner.

Those 15,418 privileged to be inside the Indian Wells Tennis Garden last night witnessed something quite remarkable, even in the extraordinary annals of Murray’s rise to tennis prominence. Where to start to try to tell the story of the British No1’s 3-6, 6-3, 7-6 (10-8) victory over Tommy Haas of Germany, the No9 seed, that guaranteed the Scottish teenager a place in the semi-finals of the Pacific Life Open? For straightforward it wasn’t.

There were at least a dozen chapters. There was the early flexing of the Murray right leg, the agonising crunch to the floor in the second set, the ten-minute period spent sitting in a chair having his ankle strapped, the amazing response with shots of spellbinding brilliance, the manipulation of his back and hips before the final set, the snaring of its first break, losing that advantage when on the cusp of victory, the 20-point ninth game when Haas held, having saved four break points, the German calling for the trainer when 6-5 ahead, a tie-break that started with Haas suffering with cramp, the two match points for the German,

the two for Murray, the second of which brought him victory and a match later today against Novak Djokovic of Serbia. It was a breathless, extravaganza after which the tournament lit up the sky with a dazzling firework display. As one commentator said: "Bit of a waste of money after a match like that."

What courage, what persistence, what brilliance, it took to bring Murray to his second Masters semifinal. We thought championship - and perhaps his spring - was over midway through the third game of the second set, which Murray led 2-0. At the climax to one of many enthralling, rallies, Murray was straining to reach a Haas crosscourt forehand when he landed awkwardly on the left ankle that is always protected by a black brace after previous problems, twisted in the air and landed in a heap on the concrete.

The way in which he immediately clutched his ankle, then placed his arm across his eyes, clearly grimacing in pain, one had to fear the worst. Haas raced around the net, Mohamed Lahyani, the umpire dashed from his chair, Gerry Armstrong, the ATP supervisor, was beside the player in a flash, all offering support and, one imagined, a consoling word or two. Though no one wants to win a match in such a circumstance (well, that's what they say), Haas must have thought he had it won. There did not seem to be a prayer that Murray could continue, let alone enjoy the lion's share of the winning shots.

But we should learn never to underestimate the lad. No, that's not fair, he's not a lad any more, even if Brad Gilbert, his coach, insists on calling him 'junior.' This is no junior. This is a practitioner of remarkable talents, for the manner in which he got beneath Haas's skin, and held sway in so many rallies, was vintage Murray.

Eight of the 18 points in the deciding tie-break were breaks of serve and you could sense that Haas - with ten years greater experience - was the more anxious of the two, not least because his left quadriceps had begun to cramp. In that desperate state, a player will conjure shots they ought not to be able to make, like the three desperate lobs Haas tossed into the sky at 3-3. Murray smashed the first two back into court, the third he cut into the net. But, as is his wont, that error was immediately wiped aside and he broke straight back. Haas had one match point on his own serve, missing with a forehand and another on Murray's when his backhand erred. Murray had his first matchy on the Haas serve but the German shaped a winning forehand; the second, on the Briton's serve was over in four strokes, when the German missed with an attempted backhand drive. The celebration were muted, for this was not an occasion for overt oneupmanship. Murray must, though, have been gloriously ecstatic inside.

Later, he said, he was in a state of shock. "I'd had a problem with that left ankle before, and when I heard something click, I didn't know whether it was my ankle or the Velcro that holds the brace together. And I'd fallen so hard I actually hurt my side more than my ankle, which meant I couldn't push off on my right side, and I had to play a lot of slice forehands to keep the ball in play.

"I don't feel proud as much as I'm happy to have come through, saving two match points. I just hope I wake up tomorrow without too many problems because at the moment I'm hurting a bit, my ankle and side and I've cut my right knee which is stiffening up at the moment. I feel OK, but I've definitely felt better.

“He (Haas) was very concerned about how I was, and that is what makes tennis such a special sport that in matches like that, the other guy is showing that much concern. Unfortunately one of us had to lose.” The first semi final today pits Rafael Nadal and Andy Roddick with Djokovic playing Murray later in the afternoon. The Scot will need all the recovery time he can muster.

Murray learns to do it the hard way

When it comes to the survival of the fittest, Britain's No1 holds his own with the best of them

Barry Flatman

Published: 18 March 2007

The difference between a supremely talented player who promises to achieve and a true contender for the game's greatest prizes who actually collects a treasure trove of silverware is a matter of bloody-minded determination, resilience and bravery.

Rod Laver, sitting in the dignitaries seats at the Indian Wells Tennis Garden, knew what it took; he used to call it going the hard yards. And the legend who achieved immortal tennis reverence long before either Rafael Nadal or Andy Murray were born was even born saw all those qualities and more as the young Scot underlined his growing maturity like never before to register the most resolute victory of his young career.

Nadal has proved his durability before. Even with his 21st birthday still three months away, he is already a proven champion of the very highest level. Nobody wins back to back French Open titles without immense physical toughness and a stable mind.

And if there were any doubts growing that perhaps the rigours of last year's entrancing rivalry with Roger Federer had taken their toll of the young Majorcan, he has responded with the perfect answer with a series of emphatic wins on the sun-baked Californian cement this week.

If Murray managed to recover from the experience of overcoming both Tommy Haas and the shock of momentarily thinking he had caused serious lasting damage to his already suspect left ankle, and just 18 hours later go out to beat his long time friend Novak Djokovic and win a place in his first ever Masters Series final against Nadal today, the young Scot will have truly earned a place among the sport's elite.

When Nadal arrived at the tournament he was acutely aware of not reaching a final since Wimbledon last July. But his form at Indian Wells has been exemplary and once again Andy Roddick was made to play the fall-guy against a superb performance, the American losing out 6-4 6-3 in last night's first semi-final.

Contrary to the belief Nadal might have lost a little direction, he seems to have upped his intensity as he plays much closer to the baseline. In addition, his serve is much more of a potent weapon and it is ominous for tonight's opponent that he has not dropped a set all week as he has muscled past opponents of the experience of former French Open champion Juan Carlos Fer-rero, one-time Australian Open finalist Arnaud Clement and Roddick.

Such is the inequity of top tennis tournament scheduling that Djokovic was back in his hotel room having savoured his both straight sets win over David Ferrer and a nutritional dinner long before Murray celebrated his 3-6 6-3 7-6 win over the intense and inform German Tommy Haas.

Indeed Djokovic had probably even called for his restaurant bill more than an hour and a half ear-lier as Murray moved left to encounter a Haas drive, turned sharply and agonisingly turned the ankle he habitually encases in an ugly black brace and fell to ground with a mixture of pain and shock etched all over his face.

For a few moments things looked bad for Murray as both trainer Michal Novotny and Haas rushed to his aid. Even when he was back on his feet and preparing to resume, they did not seem much better. In encounters gone where the 19 year-Scot had suffered some form of physical problem, he had invariably fallen away to defeat after initially promising much.

However there is not only an increasing sensibility in Murray's personality this year and a vast improvement in his physical fitness which is testament to the diligent work of coach Brad Gil-bert and physical trainer Mark Grabow.

He is also a far more valiant competitor who adheres to the oft-voiced adage that there are times when you have to play hurt. And he does not let the pain cloud his vision of victory.

"I can't explain how I won the match," he said after two hours and 51 minutes of combat with ninth seeded Haas. "I was in a bit of shock because I've had problems with my ankle before. My ankle was hurting after the fall but my right hip hurt the most after I landed badly on that and I also banged my knee. It was hard to push off on my right leg for my serve and forehand I'm glad I won but I'm not really sure how I managed to do it."

The answers are quite simple. Some rapidly applied ice to prevent swelling of the ankle, some expertly applied strapping by Novotny and the combination of Murray's

doggedness and sublime shot making. He played a more precise and accurate game after the injury.

Indeed, come the climax of the match it was Murray who looked the fitter man and Haas required vigorous massage to both thighs as the onset of cramp began to flash its danger signals. Admittedly, Murray had to weather two match points in the deciding set's tie-break but his refusal to buckle in such situations is becoming another massive factor in his climb towards the game's top 10. Last year he won his first title in San Jose, proving mentally tougher than Lleyton Hewitt in a final set shootout and since then he has maintained a 100% record in such situations.

Haas, a semi-finalist at the Australian Open and champion without ever dropping his serve last month in Memphis, presented opposition of a quality only rivalled by Hewitt. But he is now the eighth member of the current top 10 who can confirm that Murray is an opponent of the highest quality. Federer, Andy Roddick, Nikolay Davydenko, Fernando Gonzalez and Ivan Ljubicic have all been beaten by Murray, while Nadal and Nalbandian have experienced extremely close encounters.

Murray gets a painful lesson from Djokovic

Neil Harman, Tennis Correspondent in Indian Wells, California

Published at 12:00AM, March 19 2007

In the food queue a couple of hours before the scheduled start of his semi-final in the Pacific Life Open here, a wan Andy Murray said that he was not sure if he was going to be able to play. At 4.30pm local time, there he was, dressed for action. An hour later, banished from a championship that many shrewd judges were tipping him to win, the British No 1 condemned his "unprofessionalism" for having started the match.

These are the growing pains of Murray — a young man who knows that he has the talent to reach the pinnacle of his sport but can succeed only if he listens to what his body is telling him. He acceded that, on Saturday, he turned a deaf ear to the pain, allowing youthful desire to have its head when caution should have been the watchword.

Murray is a teenager and at that age common sense does not always have the last word. The Scot was through to only his second semi-final in a Masters Series event, he had been playing some mesmerising tennis, he had pulled off wins against the No 4 and No 9 players in the world and although his joints were aching, his right knee was cut, his right hip was bruised and his movement was hampered, there was something burning within that screamed: "Play! Play!"

And so he played, and lost heavily, 6-2, 6-3 to Novak Djokovic, of Serbia, a fellow 19-year-old who, having reached the final, has leap-frogged Murray into the world's top ten. That

probably hurt more than his joints did, even though he inched a place higher to No 12, a career best. It was evident from the first exchanges that Murray was not going to be able to play at the level required to hold Djokovic at bay.

Brad Gilbert, his coach, was not his usual animated self. Having seen as much tennis as he has, Gilbert had probably accepted what was coming. Murray believed that had Jean-Pierre Bruyère, the French chiropractor who has travelled with him and several other British players to tournaments worldwide, been in attendance, there would have been sounder counsel on which to base his decision.

Bruyère is expected to be in Key Biscayne, Florida, this week for the second of the back-to-back Masters, the Sony Ericsson Open. But why was he not here in California? A money-saving exercise, internal LTA bickering, an administrative cock-up? Such is the investment in Murray, it is imperative that everything done in his name is done with care and attention. “His [Bruyère’s] input would have helped a lot,” Murray said. “I’ve been working with him for about four years and he knows my body really well.

We’d spoken about the possibility of having surgery on my ankle at the end of last year because it is kind of weak [which they decided against]. Brad isn’t a physio or a doctor. He just asked me how I was and I said, ‘I’m doing better, I’ll give it a go.’ I appreciate what the physios did here — they told me it wouldn’t get any worse — but when you have somebody who knows your body well, that really helps.”

All of this came about because Murray had been so resilient in his quarter-final against Tommy Haas, of Germany, in a match as compelling as any in the Murray annals, with the Scot sitting on a chair having an ankle taped at the start of the second set, after throwing himself at a forehand. He bloodied a knee and hurt a hip in the process, the combination of which conspired against his preparedness for the semi-final more than the injury to his ankle.

Farther up the scale, for Rafael Nadal, the long wait to collect a trophy — it had been almost ten months since his second French Open success — is over. Nadal’s record in finals is 18 wins and three losses — it is the getting to finals that has been the Spaniard’s recent problem — and in brilliant conditions here, and without dropping a set in the tournament, he returned to the winner’s rostrum after beating Djokovic 6-2, 7-5.

Murray plays through pain barrier

Barry Flatman

ANDY MURRAY, still battered and bruised despite five days of recuperation following his travails of last weekend, appreciated that luck was on his side as he made a laboured opening to his Sony Ericsson Open campaign in Miami.

A decent run in the year's second Masters Series event should elevate the 19-year-old into the world's top 10 for the first time and, after overcoming Paul Goldstein 6-2 7-6, the Scot found he would not have to face the former world No 1 Lleyton Hewitt as expected. Hewitt, three times a semi-finalist in this event, was forced to withdraw due to a back injury suffered nearly two weeks ago.

Murray will now play America's Robert Kendrick - the 87th-ranked right-hander who Murray has twice beaten in the past nine months. Last year he pitched him out of the first round of the US Open, having previously beaten him 6-0 6-0 on the grass of Newport, Rhode Island.

Murray was concerned about how his battered body would stand up as he walked out to face Goldstein. He has taken things easy since hobbling away with an aching hip and ankle, as well as a badly cut knee, following his defeat to Novak Djokovic in Indian Wells.

Murray broke Goldstein's serve in the opening game and repeated the feat twice more as he cruised to the first set in 36 minutes. However, he revealed things were not quite as easy as they seemed. "I was out of breath and pretty tired to be honest," said the 12th seed. "I've only had about 2 hours of practice over the past six days and the conditions here are different to Indian Wells."

Goldstein is a determined opponent and put up stern resistance in the second set. Murray served for the match at 5-4 but his opponent battled back to force a tie-break. Normal service eventually resumed as the Scot took it 7-4 to round off victory in one hour 34 minutes, but he admitted: "He [Goldstein] fights hard in every match but I did well to hang on in the tie-break, although it's difficult when you haven't hit many balls in the past few days."

Djokovic says rivalry with Murray is good for the game

Novak Djokovic believes his battles with Andy Murray could freshen up world tennis. The Serbian takes on the British No 1 for a place in the Sony Ericsson Open final in Miami tomorrow, the pair's second successive clash in the last four of a Masters Series event. Djokovic shares a good friendship with his fellow 19-year-old, the pair having been rivals at junior level. He won their last meeting in the semi-finals at Indian Wells a fortnight ago but he is expecting a sterner test this time.

Murray was hampered on that occasion by hip and ankle problems sustained an epic encounter with Tommy Haas the previous day but this time his progress has come courtesy of an Andy Roddick injury. "I'm expecting a really, really good match," Djokovic said after last night's quarter-final win over Spain's Rafael Nadal. "We're playing semi-finals two Masters Series in a row."

Both Djokovic and Murray are chasing their first Masters Series titles and, with confidence high on both sides of the net, it could prove a compelling clash. "He is probably fitter than in the last one," Djokovic said. "Two young players, it's always nice. I think it's a great thing for tennis to see Rafael Nadal, Murray and myself playing so well and bringing something so new into tennis."

The Serbian was thrilled with his 6-3, 6-4 victory over Nadal: "I have to say that this is the biggest and probably the most important victory in my career, and he's the best player I ever won against. I've had some unbelievable results in the last couple of months. I'm in great shape, feeling really confident on the court."

Murray, who became the first Briton to reach the semi-finals of the tournament since Tim Henman in 1998 when Roddick withdrew from yesterday's match with a leg injury, has extra incentive to win as he eyes a place in the world's top ten. Murray also feels he will benefit from a day's rest before his clash with Djokovic. "I feel like I'm in good shape, I'm definitely going to have enough time off to be 100 per cent fit going into the match," he said. "It will be a good match for me, a good test, and one that I'm looking forward to."

Murray finds Serbian rival a bridge too far again

Neil Harman

Published at 12:00AM, March 31 2007

For the second Masters Series semi-final in succession, Andy Murray was on court in the flesh but he should have had his feet up, resting. His worst defeat as a professional here yesterday was, as he said, a humbling experience and one he ought to have avoided. The British No 1, it is believed, took a heavy tumble in practice on Thursday, hurting his left groin. Ironically, after he had been beaten by Novak Djokovic in Indian Wells two weeks earlier, he said that, with a more mature appreciation of his physical wellbeing after a

spectacular fall in the quarter-final, he probably would not have played. His 6-1, 6-0 loss in 62 minutes to Djokovic was a preventable accident.

Murray insisted he would not make excuses because he assumed that if he admitted he was hurt and had forfeited, the questions would have had a greater edge. All he got for his decision to commit was a veritable drubbing and a round of catcalls — the consolations for which were a cheque for \$134,400 (about £69,000) and a highest-ever ranking of No 11. “It’s the worst I’ve played since I came on to the tour, it’s happened before to better players than me and I never want it to happen again,” he said. “The reason I lost the match was that he played much better than me. I couldn’t do anything to upset him, or mess up his rhythm.”

Djokovic is flying, Murray was burnt in the slipstream. The Serb is into his second consecutive Masters final after his breakthrough in Indian Wells two weeks ago. There, he took too long to get going and could not make up the ground on Rafael Nadal. Two days ago, he swept past the Spaniard in straight sets. Tomorrow he meets either Guillermo Cañas, of Argentina, or Ivan Ljubicic, from Croatia, for one of the premier prizes in the game. Murray — and Great Britain — can only hope that the wounds will heal in time for next week’s Davis Cup tie against the Netherlands in Birmingham, where they cannot sell every seat. So much has to ride on Murray’s talent that any time he slips below, well below, his expected levels, there is a monumental grinding of teeth. The look of disbelief on the face of Brad Gilbert, his coach, as this episode unfolded yesterday told the whole story.

Murray aims for the top

Barry Flatman, tennis correspondent

Published at 12:00AM, April 15 2007

The teenager breaks into the top 10 but knows there is more work ahead if he is to maintain his progress

SHEER emotion doubtless accentuated Andy Murray’s admission that he was in shock after his membership of the world’s top 10 players became a certainty once the ATP’s computer clicks into action early tomorrow.

If Murray is surprised then he is in a minority of one. But what is surprising is the speed at which the 19-year-old has risen.

Not quite two years have elapsed since he ambled on to court in Barcelona for his full ATP debut. He lost that day but the climbing process had begun and he has sprinted up the metaphorical mountain that is the ATP ranking system.

Impatience is clearly a trait of the single-minded young man. Roger Federer required 4½ years between making his full tour debut to entering the top 10, Spaniard Rafael Nadal needed exactly three.

Of course that wunderkind Boris Becker required just 18 months but in recent times only Juan Carlos Ferrero has been quicker than Murray. Hopefully the Scot will not suffer the catalogue of injuries and badly advised decisions that saw the player who topped the rankings for eight weeks in 2003 spiral downwards a year later.

Murray is of course made of stern stuff and his list of accomplishments against his new peers in the world's top 10 makes impressive reading. He has beaten Federer and on a more fortunate evening might have got the better of Nadal. Andy Roddick now treats any meeting with trepidation while the likes of Nikolay Davydenko, Fernando Gonzalez and Ivan Ljubicic share the American's concern.

Competitively Murray now has few faults. As a returner of serve he is among the very best, his hand-to-eye coordination and ability to feed off the pace of his opponent's delivery something that few coaches can teach. Similarly, his ability to come up with the killer blow after an extended baseline rally is a trademark.

Where once his fitness was a problem, he can now happily go into the marathon matches and not begin to feel vulnerable. Credit must go to his fitness trainer Mark Grabow for adding muscle that has made his serve a far more threatening weapon.

Tactically, Murray is magnificent in terms of working to a game plan. His coach Brad Gilbert has played a big part but, as the Californian says, you can only lead a horse to water, you cannot make him drink.

What is concerning is Murray's habit of arriving for matches with an injury. Negligence should not compromise chances and that seemingly is what happened against Novak Djokovic in Miami a fortnight ago. Murray injured a groin muscle in what should have been the lightest on-court session after being handed a semi-final place by Andy Roddick's retirement. Instead he was unable to move properly and the 6-1 6-0 scoreline in Djokovic's favour tells a salutary tale.

Not too long ago, Murray had a reputation for wandering on to the practice court with just moments to spare, occasionally still breakfasting on a chocolate chip muffin. Such behaviour is now a thing of the past but questions still arise after the Miami semi-final. Can bad luck simply take the blame? "Of course you would like to say so but people would be right to ask questions," said one experienced player. "Do the likes of Roger Federer get injured in practice before such a big match? No. You have to ask whether Andy did all his stretching correctly beforehand."

To suggest that Murray has fulfilled his aims by reaching this lofty position would, of course, be crass. He has his sights focused on the world No 1 spot, but it is still a long way off.

What he does admirably is set himself targets and achieve them well ahead of schedule. Now he must accept the next progression is first a Masters Series title, then a Grand Slam. But with this feisty young man, anything is possible.

Maturing Murray ready to reach new heights on and off the court

Neil Harman, Tennis Correspondent

Published at 12:00AM, May 15 2007

Andy Murray emerges from his teenage angst this morning, blinking into the light of a third decade, one in which so many startling things are being prepared for him – even if, in the short term at least, his Davis Cup plans are uncertain. “For his age,” Brad Gilbert, his coach, says, “he is incredibly professional and incredibly thorough.”

John McEnroe may, in a moment of irony that he was quickest of all to recognise, have railed against Murray’s negativity on the court, but he had the Scot’s best interests at heart. “For all he’s got, I’d like to see him be positive more often,” the American said. It was a defeat by Gilbert in the Masters at Madison Square Garden in January 1986 that sent the former world No 1 scurrying off into a period of such self-pity that he did not play again for almost seven months.

The greying pair eye each other warily even now but Murray’s choice of Gilbert, made around his 19th birthday, is the best thing that could have happened to him. There is focus off court and gimlet-eyed ferocity on it. No British player has been so highly ranked so young. Fred Perry was 25 when he won the first of his three consecutive Wimbledon titles, so when Murray insists he will not be ready to win a grand-slam tournament for a couple of years, there is an historical as well as an honest perspective.

Neither, though, might he be in a position to help Great Britain’s cause when they take on Croatia in a Davis Cup world group play-off in September. On the eve of his 20th birthday, Murray, preparing to take on Filippo Volandri at the Hamburg Masters today, said that his participation in the tie at Wimbledon is in doubt because of the likelihood of injuries being caused by changing surfaces from grass to hard courts.

“It’s just the way the schedule is and why Federer and Nadal miss the Davis Cup, because it’s a different surface pretty much every week,” Murray said. “I might have to consider my Davis Cup commitments in the future. I want to be ready for these tournaments. You have to think about the Tour first because that is what you’re making your career from.”

It was said that whenever an opponent played an especially good shot against him, Perry would cry out “Very clevah.” Jack Kramer, the American who will be a special guest of Tim Phillips, the All England Club chairman, at Wimbledon this year, once wrote: “I never played Fred competitively but I heard enough from other guys that that ‘Very clevah’ drove a lot of opponents crazy.” One could imagine Murray saying something similar, perhaps a little fruitier, beneath his breath, for he has a dry, laconic sense of humour, which is developing as he becomes more familiar with the territory of a leading professional sportsman. He is increasingly comfortable in his own skin, filling out into a prime specimen.

For Murray to achieve as much as he demands from himself, what happens outside the lines requires constant invigilation. Patricio Apey has been his manager for 18 months, during which a place inside the Scot's portfolio has become one of the more keenly sought in British sport. "I'd venture to say that he is a lot more successful than most 19 about to become 20-year-olds at this stage of their career," Apey said. "He tends to exceed in everything he does. "We have hit each and every target in his business plan to build the Andy Murray brand. It is the credibility we look at, not the bottom line.

"Andy is very highly sought after. Everyone wants him, be it Blue Peter or Peter Pan. The biggest challenge is to manage his time, recognising every time that he is a professional sportsman, first and foremost."

Murray's spirits high after injury deals another blow to ambitions

Neil Harman, Tennis Correspondent

Published at 12:00AM, May 16 2007

Having played as well as he has all year for half an hour, it was likely that something would ruin Andy Murray's 20th birthday bash. And so a wrist injury – no one is sure how bad it is – followed those to the hip, groin, ankle and back that have curtailed the Scot's enjoyment of what could be a momentous period.

Murray will head home from Hamburg this morning to determine the severity of the damage to his right wrist that forced him to default from his first-round match against Filippo Volandri, of Italy – one he had dominated in every respect. What is certain is that he will not be performing at the French Open, which begins at Roland Garros on Sunday week. The grass is next.

Fated, fragile or just plain frustrating, those were the emotions rushing around the minds of those nearest to Murray and probably the player himself. He managed to look on the bright side later, but deep down he must wonder when this ill-luck with injury will run its course. He became a top-ten player last month on a day he did not raise a racket and since then he has completed one match – his first-round defeat in the BNL d'Italia Masters in Rome by Gilles Simon, of France, last week – hobbled away after one set of a doubles with his brother, Jamie, in Monte Carlo using his chiropractor as a crutch and now this, perhaps the most bizarre, when he was playing, in his words, "awesome tennis."

Murray won the first 12 points against the Italian who had ruined Roger Federer's trip to Rome. There was nothing that Volandri could do to quell the opposition's dominance until, on the first point of the seventh game, with Murray leading 5-1, the British No 1 said that he

felt something give in his right wrist. On the next point he tried to hit a forehand drop shot and then fell to his haunches, gripping the wrist with his left hand.

The wrist was taped, he tested it with a couple more serves, but the pain returned. Brad Gilbert, his coach, did not seem amused by what he was witnessing and received a few choice words from his charge.

Murray was taken to a local hospital for a scan and will discover the results today, although he said that he fears tendon damage. "I'm not depressed," he said. "I'm just having a bad run with injuries.

"I was hitting the ball so cleanly today and I showed myself that whatever some might think of my abilities on clay, I've improved an awful lot."

And so Murray faces another practice period at the National Tennis Centre in Roehampton, southwest London, where those who run the LTA and have funded the signing of his coach, might be perturbed at his apparent reluctance to commit to the Davis Cup, a competition that does much to enhance the profile of a national association.

Break Point

If Andy Murray tries to rush back from his wrist injury, he may be risking his long-term future

Barry Flatman

Published: 20 May 2007

Pink is not Andy Murray's choice of colour, but his attention today will remain focused on the garish fibreglass cast on his right wrist as he ponders his misfortune at missing the French Open and the underlying reasons for his enforced rest.

Many observers have questioned the young Scot's demean-our and language since he emerged as potentially Britain's most successful tennis player since Fred Perry.

Many others felt an empathy with him as he gave voice to his pain with the loudest of profanities as his 20th birthday turned into a nightmare. However, few people inside the game are surprised that the British No 1 has joined the list of casualties with an injury to the joint that is most susceptible to the rigours of tennis in the 21st century.

Long before he rose to his current position inside the world's top 10, Murray took a gamble by opting to use a racket customised to enhance his game but which increased the chances of injury because of the torque it put on his wrist.

The joint is the primary shock absorber for any player, but in Murray's case the load is accentuated. His basic racket, a Head Flexpoint Prestige, weighs a relatively standard 430 grams (15.1oz).

However, seeking to find more power, he has long modified the head of the racket with lead tape while taking weight out of the handle. Consequently it provides him with one of the heaviest swing-weights in the history of the game, in the region of 490 grams.

Pete Sampras set the trend on his path to collecting a record 14 Grand Slam titles. His opponents marvelled at the weight of shots that repeatedly went flying past them. The current generation see it as a method of heightening their velocity.

Murray has been playing with heavy swing-weight since the age of 16. He also has his rackets strung at extremely high tension, employing unyielding synthetic on the downward strands and traditional gut, which further contributes to the rigidity and increases the force to which the wrist is subjected. Assuming that his timing is precise and he hits the ball in the sweet spot, he can generate far greater power with his ground-strokes while employing a relatively short backswing. But there is an element of risk if connection is not perfect.

Normally Murray does not employ the exaggerated western forehand grip in the manner of Rafael Nadal and other Spanish and South American clay-court experts. It allows immense topspin to be imparted on the ball, but by the nature of its contorted posture it invites injury, particularly when the ball takes an unexpected low bounce.

However, he does veer towards the western grip and on clay accentuates it. The traditional frigid conditions in Hamburg at the beginning of the week made bounces far more unpredictable.

Since returning from Germany, Murray has spent much of his time at the Lawn Tennis Association's National Training Centre in Roehampton. Just around the corner is the laboratory of Dr Stuart Miller, the International Tennis Federation's Head of Science and Technical Study. He is the world's foremost authority on racket and ball technology.

"The good news was that the MRI scan showed no fracture, but ligament or tendon strain is consistent with a mis-hit off the centre line or the ball connecting too near the head of the racket," said Miller.

In general the older rackets, particularly the wooden ones, were more forgiving when the ball did not hit the sweetest part of the string face. Now technology means players are hitting the ball so much harder, with a far greater force of swing.

"When the connection is not perfect on the forehand, the wrist is flexing at the moment of impact, but the racket recoils. The force therefore extends the wrist, causing the tendons to stretch."

Whereas strapping can be employed to support joints such as ankles and even knees - Murray has worn an ankle brace since taking a tumble in the Stella Artois championships at Queen's Club in 2005 - his wrist remains unencumbered to provide the potential to relax the joint and play with the deftest touch. Murray is known for his love of the drop shot and his ability would be impaired by any restraint.

"The wrist has become vulnerable because of the difference in stroke production at all levels," says David Dines, the ATP's head physician, who points out that the joint is required not only to flex and extend but also rotate.

Murray's forehand, with his minimal backswing and ability to take the ball on the rise but still generate extreme power, bears a close resemblance to that of Andre Agassi.

The former world No 1 suffered two bouts of chronic wrist problems that many experts attributed to his forehand technique. Before undergoing surgery in December 1993, he resorted to cortisone injections until Richard Scheinberg, the surgeon who reconstructed Jimmy Connors's wrist three years earlier, discovered a mass of scar tissue.

For a while Agassi was afraid to hit his signature shot. "It caused handicaps mentally and emotionally, as well as hurting my game, because every time I hit the forehand and it didn't hurt, I was wondering when the pain was going to start," he said. "And when it hurt, I was wondering how bad it was going to get."

Another former world No 1 who suffered wrist problems was Boris Becker, who has been playing in Hamburg on the BlackRock Champions Tour that culminates in December at London's Albert Hall. The German sympathised with Murray, saying: "It was one of the worst injuries I ever had. Your right wrist is an important part for a tennis player's body. It took me three to four months to recover and at least a year to stop thinking about it."

Becker is insistent that Murray seek out the best possible advice and follow it. "Everyone is going to ask him to be ready for Wimbledon, but if he is not fit, he shouldn't play," Becker added. "He's got a long career ahead of him and shouldn't push it now. It's important he has the right doctors, the right advisers to tell him what is wrong, and to do the right things for recovery, because you only have one right wrist. He shouldn't rush getting back."

Murray's initial orders were to immobilise the injury for five days to allow swelling from the initial trauma to subside. He is due to undergo a further examination tomorrow, either with another MRI scan or ultrasound. However, on Friday afternoon his agent, Patricio Apey, said there was a possibility that the player might even change the doctor he is due to see. "Andy is mature beyond his years and understands what needs to be done," said Apey.

If Murray needs a source of optimism, he need look no further than the recently retired Greg Rusedski and the familiar setting of San Jose's HP Pavillion where, in February, Murray retained the singles title.

Ten years earlier Rusedski faced Sampras in the final after beating Agassi in the semi and took the first set before acute wrist pain forced him to quit the match and leave the court in tears.

Rusedski feared that he faced an indefinite lay-off, but before the end of the year he had reached the US Open final, won two titles, qualified for the year-ending ATP Championships and achieved a career-high ranking of No 4 in the world.

Wimbledon left waiting anxiously after Murray confirms withdrawal from Paris

Neil Harman, Tennis Correspondent

Published at 12:00AM, May 23 2007

To say that the clay has not been kind to Andy Murray this year would be akin to suggesting that, underneath his barbed wire exterior, Sir Alex Ferguson loves all those foreign coaches in the Barclays Premiership. The British No 1 – Murray rather than Ferguson – has played one full match that took five hours to complete because of a rain delay, one bit of a match, one set of doubles and clocked up nothing but air miles, despair and disappointment.

One consequence is that Murray has slipped out of the world top-ten rankings, so what can we look forward to – if anything – from the grass-court season? Murray's decision yesterday to withdraw from the French Open, which was inevitable the moment you saw the agony Murray was suffering in Hamburg last week, is the right one, but its pessimistic undertones made one nervous for his Wimbledon prospects.

There was no indication yesterday of the extent of the injury to his right wrist, although there were suggestions that he has a slight tendon tear that would necessitate six weeks' rest and recuperation. That would mean no Murray at Wimbledon and no hysteria that his place in the championships is bound, sadly, to generate. If the conclusion is for complete rest, that is what it should be.

Wrists are notoriously fragile – ask Venus Williams, Kim Clijsters, Xavier Malisse, Paradorn Srichaphan and Nicolas Kiefer, all of whom have been sidelined by different types of injury in the same area. In Clijsters's case, it was a factor in her retirement.

Kiefer, the talented German, is poised for a return after a year out with wrist trouble.

The pink and white cast that adorned Murray's damaged wrist for a week has been taken off, the progress will be closely monitored and Patricio Apey, the player's manager, said last night that a decision will be made on his participation in the Artois Championships at Queen's Club, West London, from June 11 "before the withdraw deadline on June 8". That does not smack of optimism, cautious or otherwise. On his personal website yesterday, Murray informed those clamouring for news that he can use the time away from the courts to work on his cardiovascular and leg strength in the gym at the National Tennis Centre in Roehampton, where he has spent a good deal more time in the past few weeks than was expected when he said a year ago that he doubted he would be there much. Roger Draper, the LTA chief executive, is in the gym at 6am every day, so there will be company at all hours.

Draper will no doubt be whispering in Murray's ear that a lot of onus is being placed at LTA headquarters on his appearance at the All England Club, not just next month but in September, for the Davis Cup World Group play-off against Croatia. And because it is thought that the LTA lost rather than made money on the tie against the Netherlands in Birmingham last month, Murray's availability next time around is vital.

Brad Gilbert, Murray's coach, who has flown home to the United States, is sanguine about a run of aggravation that began in the first Masters Series tournament of the year, in Indian Wells, California, in March, when he threw himself full length on the cement to attempt an audacious forehand recovery in the quarter-final against Tommy Haas, the German, and damaged a hip. Since then, his progress has resembled a medic's chart – Miami (groin), Monte Carlo (back), Hamburg (wrist).

"He's been banged up since that first fall in Indian Wells, but I guess if you are going to have these problems it might as well happen in the clay-court season," Gilbert said. "You don't always have control over situations, you can have a run of bad luck and suddenly 'boom' and one good tournament turns the thing around. Sometimes you're in great shape but don't play well."

Murray refuses to wax lyrical over prospects of making Wimbledon

Neil Harman, Tennis Correspondent

Published at 12:00AM, June 21 2007

The breeze tugged at his tousled hair and his shirt billowed. The occasional shot skewed far from the heart of his racket, but the grass beneath Roger Federer's feet felt like a comfort blanket. For five days, the Wimbledon champion has been utilising his membership of the All England Club and there was an air of serenity about his every move yesterday.

During an hour's hit with Fernando Gonz lez, of Chile – a repeat of this year's Australian Open final – Federer showed no sign of the muscle problems that forced him to withdraw

from last week's tournament in Germany, which for the past four years has offered a winning prelude to glory in SW19. Between the odd urgent "C'mon, Rog" were moments of beauty, with one particularly cute angled cross-court backhand winner drawing "that's the way I want to play that shot" from the world No 1.

Pausing to report that all was as well as it could be with him – "I've had some very good practice, no worries at all with the muscles," the Swiss said after ten days without competition since his defeat by Rafael Nadal in the final of the French Open – it was into the back of a courtesy car and up the hill to his home from home.

Nothing is quite so rosy for Andy Murray, who remains in the draw for the championships and is seeded No 8, although his practice sessions have been few and far between – indeed, he has not been seen at Wimbledon since Monday. That and the fact that he will not play a match at the Boodles exhibition at Stoke Park, Buckinghamshire, where he unveiled a waxwork of himself yesterday, suggest that his chance of participation at Wimbledon is fading fast.

Until there is a definitive statement from the Wimbledon referee's office, the British No 1 is in the field and with the club's endorsement of his ATP ranking – it adopts a grass-court formula that can be used to shift a player's places inside the 32 seeded positions – there is the added protection of not having to play anyone ranked higher until the quarter-finals at least.

Patricio Apey, his manager, said yesterday that if Murray decides not to risk the right wrist he damaged during his first-round match in the Hamburg Masters last month, any withdrawal would come sooner rather than later. The longer the saga was extended, the more chance there was of him taking his place in the first round, but he cannot hit full out on his forehand.

Murray's reluctance to commit is understandable. Equally, he finds it difficult to bring himself to believe that he cannot play. That we are four days from the world's premier tennis championships and the 20-year-old has been unable to strike the ball with what he would consider the requisite power suggests that he would be taking a huge risk in playing. And, remember, he has completed only one singles match in ten weeks.

"It would only take me one or two matches to get back into the swing of things," he said. "If I could play a match in the Boodles this week [he had a 20-minute fun hit for a TV competition there yesterday], I can play Wimbledon. But if I miss Wimbledon to make certain of 100 per cent fitness, I don't have a problem with that. I've never had such a period off the tour before and my ranking has managed to stay where it was. That shows me how well I was playing over an extended period and that I am mentally stronger."

Of those in the highest echelons of the Wimbledon draw, Tomas Berdych, of the Czech Republic, has been granted the most significant seeding leap, from the No 11 seed on the computer to No 7. Berdych won the Gerry Weber Open in Halle, Germany, last week, a sign of his improving pedigree. Moving in the opposite direction is Tommy Robredo, the world No 7 from Spain, who becomes the No 11 seed. You win some, you lose some.

Murray rules himself out of Wimbledon

Times Online and Agencies

Published at 1:37PM, June 24 2007

Andy Murray has withdrawn from this year's Wimbledon after failing to recover from a wrist injury he suffered in Hamburg last month.

The British number one had planned on leaving the decision on his participation at the All England Club until after his practice session on Monday.

But after an indoor session at Roehampton today, the 20-year-old announced he would not risk further damage to his wrist.

"I have done everything possible to get ready for Wimbledon," he said. "I have played practice sets the last few days but still cannot hit a topspin forehand properly.

"It has been six weeks of really hard work but I'm not 100 per cent ready. The wrist is a very important part of tennis and there are a number of players who have made the decision to come back too soon and ended up with long-term injuries and I do not want to take the risk and make the same mistake.

"The doctor has advised me not to play and that I probably need about 10 days to be ready. Unfortunately, I don't think it is going to rain for the next 10 days.

"I love playing Wimbledon because of the great support I get from the British public and that is what I will miss the most."

Earlier his mother Judy had suggested that he would not risk himself if he was not totally happy with his fitness.

"If he's not 100 per cent he would be very unwise to play," she said. "The injury affects the forehand and none of the other shots. The forehand is a huge part of his game and he has to hit through it to make an impact.

"He has a long career ahead of him and at this stage it would be silly to take any risks."

Henman back in the spotlight after loss of flag-bearer

Neil Harman, Tennis Correspondent

Published at 12:00AM, June 25 2007

Behind the darkened windows of the Mercedes that rushed him away from the LTA's National Tennis Centre in Roehampton, southwest London - a touch over the top, perhaps - Andy Murray was making the decision that brought an end to the game of jeopardy he had contemplated playing with the most fragile element of a tennis player's ability to strike a ball properly.

Ever since he screamed in pain when what appeared a straightforward forehand shot in Hamburg went horribly wrong, Murray's prospects of returning within six weeks defied logic and experience. Those players who have spent days and months in rehabilitation with wrist problems formed a queue urging him to adopt a sensible course.

But Murray is a 20-year-old who has broken into the world's top ten in a hurry and who possesses such a sense of his own destiny at Wimbledon, that it must have been hard to say no. As Jamie Baker, his fellow Scot and long-time friend, who practised with him for an hour yesterday, said: "Andy had every right to want to play Wimbledon, he's like a God around the place." One could tell by the reaction of his mother, Judy, in a BBC studio yesterday morning, as she studied the newspaper reports, which suggested Andy was ready to play, that she was not convinced. "I hope he will do the right thing," she said, anxious that he would not place any emphasis on playing Wimbledon for the sake of it.

Of course, a lot rode on Murray playing, not least in endorsement potential. The LTA wanted him involved not only for himself, but because he is needed to drive up interest that is crumbling at club level and could have done with a fortnight of feisty fascination.

What could be worse for an organisation that knows it comes under severe scrutiny at this time of the year than to lose the talisman whom it has bent over backwards to promote and protect? Hopefully, Brad Gilbert, Murray's coach, will still be available to offer succour to those British players in the draw who can do with his encouragement and expertise. For, barring a sensation, this will be only the second time in 16 years that there will be no British representation in the second week of the championships.

The loss of Murray means that Tim Henman, who has won three matches and a dead Davis Cup rubber in 2007, will now carry the load - as if he wasn't used to that. Five British men have wild cards into the main draw and a sixth, Lee Childs, earned his spot through the qualifying competition.

The Scots' banner will be carried by Baker, who meets the Frenchman, Edouard Roger-Vasselin, a qualifier, on No 4 Court today. He was hitting with Murray yesterday and knew his compatriot was fragile. "I was playing full-out, no doubt about that," Baker said. "Andy knows it's the day before I'm playing Wimbledon, probably the biggest match of my life, and I wasn't going to be feeding him the ball.

"I'm more confident about my game this year as compared to last [when he lost in the first round to Andreas Seppi, of Italy]. I'm more comfortable in the environment and all the things that go towards playing at Wimbledon. I feel I'll be able to handle all that tomorrow and I've got to be happy with my draw. He's a good player, but he's not Roger Federer. "Recently, I've had my first win on the ATP Tour at Queen's, qualified for Nottingham, practised with Rafael Nadal, played an exhibition against Novak Djokovic, practised with

Tim Henman and then with Andy. I don't think I could have done more to prepare properly."

So, while Baker, Childs, Josh Goodall, Jonny Marray, Richard Bloomfield, Alex Bogdanovic and, of course, Henman, prepare to hold British hopes, Murray will reflect on the first half of the year that has told him an enormous amount about his character and also, one hopes, has covered enough injuries to last him the next five. Kevin Kim, an American, comes into the main draw as a lucky loser.

Suffering Murray forced out

Neil Harman, Tennis Correspondent

Published at 12:00AM, June 25 2007

He had said all along that he would not be stupid and yesterday Andy Murray made the only decision a tennis player who cannot hit the ball properly one day before Wimbledon could make. If one more dark cloud formed over SW19 with the withdrawal of the British No 1, light was shed on the attitude that offers a wonderful chance of winning this championship one day.

The British No 1 has bowed to the inevitable and decided not to risk jeopardising the wrist that he hurt so badly on a cold, wet day in Hamburg last month. It was cold and wet at the All England Club yesterday, as if in a mood of mournful commiseration. Murray practised on an indoor court with Jamie Baker, his fellow Scot, at the National Tennis Centre in Roehampton, realised his situation was impossible and rang the referee's office at Wimbledon.

"I've done everything possible to get ready, I've played practice sets in the last few days, but I can't hit a top-spin forehand properly," he said. "It has been six weeks of hard work, but I'm not 100 per cent. The wrist is a very important part of tennis and there are players who have made the decision to come back too soon and ended up with long-term injuries and I don't want to make the same mistake.

"The doctor has advised me that I probably need another ten days to be ready.

Unfortunately, I don't think it's going to rain for the next ten days. I love playing Wimbledon because of the great support I get from the British public and that is what I'll miss the most."

Murray was hurt in the opening set of his first-round match in the Hamburg Masters on clay when, leading Filippo Volandri, of Italy, 5-1, he reacted with anguish after playing what seemed like a routine forehand. The extent of the injury was kept secret until he revealed on Saturday that it was a small tear of one of the tendons. "I don't know the exact medical term," he said.

His doctors had advised him that he could not "reinjure" the wrist, but it has not healed to the extent required for him to compete in the biggest tennis championship in the world. He will now concentrate on preparing for the hard-court season, leading to the US Open.

Murray calls shots but has respect for the man propelling him to top in hurry

Matthew Syed in Bradenton, Florida

Published at 12:00AM, July 27 2007

Andy Murray and Brad Gilbert, the odd couple of British sport, are out on court at the Nick Bollettieri Tennis Academy in western Florida. The weather is not conducive to strenuous exercise — a temperature in the mid-80s and humidity so oppressive it seems to suck the oxygen from one's lungs — but they have been doing their thing for more than 90 minutes. Gilbert is watching from the edge of the court in trademark posture: arms folded, back straight, his wraparound shades concealing any thoughts he may have as he watches his young charge play the full repertoire of shots in preparation for the ATP event in Washington next week, Murray's first competitive outing since injuring his right wrist ten weeks ago. Other than the odd word of encouragement, the American seems content to let Murray find his own way.

Murray, for his part, goes about his business with an air of mild disgust for his profession, the occasional expletive escaping his parched lips as he does battle with the hellish conditions. His hitting partner — Michael McClune, a 17-year-old from California — is also feeling it. Two days previously McClune vomited — loudly and liberally — at the end of the morning session. This is the daily grind of professional tennis, the life that Murray and Gilbert have shared for 12 months.

By any reckoning it is one of sport's more unlikely coach-player relationships: Gilbert, the straight-talking, sharp-shooting obsessive who has had to learn the art of quiet diplomacy to coax the best from his waspish charge, and Murray, the 20-year-old wunderkind with the sharp mind and sharper tongue who is not afraid to use crimson language when he disagrees with Gilbert but who has come to respect the American's tactical nous and all-round dedication.

One year after being manacled together with the help of a sizeable cheque from the LTA, the Oscar and Felix of the tennis world are still talking and the relationship is still working. "Brad steers clear of the technical stuff and allows me to express myself with the shots I have developed over the years," Murray says after slumping down at the conclusion of the session.

"But he is tactically brilliant. He takes the time to scout opponents and watch videos so we can come up with the right strategy for each one. He has made a big difference, which is great because I would not have been able to afford him without the help of the LTA." But does Murray wear the trousers in the relationship? "It is important that a player knows his own mind and takes ownership of his programme," the British No 1 says. "I am not the kind of person who will just follow instructions without getting involved."

A couple of days earlier, in the weights room of the academy, Gilbert had offered his thoughts on his turbulent protégé. "There is no magic pill, no guarantees, I just try my ass

off to get Andy to be as good as he can get,” he said. “But it helps a lot that Andy is someone with bags of talent.”

But how does Gilbert cope when he gets a verbal lashing, as often happens when Murray loses his rag during matches? “It’s not a personal thing,” Gilbert said. “It’s more a personal thing to himself that he is not doing better. He’s just venting. I would never have done it to my coach and Andre \ would not have done it to me. But that’s the thing: everyone is different and you have to handle what comes your way. I don’t think it’s good if he does it day in, day out. But that’s his release a little bit.” Is it something that is diminishing over time? “I hope so,” he said, laughing.

Many have sought to unpick the Murray psyche, but one comment during our courtside conversation is particularly revelatory. For some reason we have got on to Harry Potter and the Scot confesses an interest.

“I went out and bought the latest book because people had been speculating that he might be killed off, which I thought was ridiculous,” he says. “I just read the last three pages to find out. It told me everything I needed to know.”

That is Murray in a nutshell: a young man in a hurry, a no-nonsense 20-year-old who cannot be doing with anything that does not get him to his intended destination in the fastest time possible. This is not someone who is likely to spend his spare moments pondering metaphysics or the finer points of Shakespeare.

“Let’s cut to the chase,” is what his dour expression is telling us. “Don’t give me the runaround.” And that is his charm. When you meet him you get the real deal, the uncut version, not the confection of some slick PR agent in the background, pulling the strings. In an age of spin and subtle deception, it is gloriously refreshing. If only he could smile more — something he began to do as he loosened up — he may even become endearing.

He begins to open up about the trials of life on the road, particularly in the context of his blossoming relationship with Kim Sears, the daughter of Nigel, a British tennis coach. “We have been together for about 19 months now,” Murray says. “She starts university in a month or so. Of course it is difficult because I am away such a lot, but if you like someone a lot it can work out. The same goes for my friends and family. Because I don’t see them that much, the time I do spend with them is that bit more valuable.

“I don’t get the chance to spend six weeks at a time with my family or girlfriend, but maybe when I get the odd week or two it means that I am really happy to be with them. Whereas if you are with them all the time, I guess you might argue and get angry with each other.”

The key to Murray’s sporting progress — and, by implication, the progress of British tennis — is staying injury-free, so it was a decision of considerable maturity to miss Wimbledon to allow his damaged wrist to recover, a process that is nearing completion. Indeed, the break from competition may assist Murray as he begins the countdown to next month’s US Open.

“I have improved my core fitness over the last ten weeks, which should hold me in good stead over the next month,” he says. “The hard thing about the American tournaments is that the courts get so hot. You can feel it through the soles of your trainers and it makes your legs really burn. That gets you even more than the heat in the air.”

Murray pulls himself off his chair to hook up again with Gilbert and stretch his weary muscles. Afterwards they will take lunch and get ready for a further hour of tennis in the late afternoon before another weight-training session. I wish him luck and he grimaces, an expression that slowly turns into a smile. One is struck with optimism that, as he matures, his relationship with the British public may become one of mutual warmth.

A few minutes later he emerges from the gym with Gilbert, the two men loping slowly off in each other's company, respectful of each other but wary, too, like a wasp and a scorpion. One suspects that they will not be pen-pals after their association ends, but it is a relationship that, so far at least, is working wonders.

Murray takes care of business

Simon Cambers in Montreal

Published at 12:00AM, August 8 2007

Andy Murray pronounced himself “pretty pleased” last night after returning from a 12-week absence because of a wrist injury to beat Robby Ginepri, of the United States, 6-4, 6-4 in the first round of the Masters Series event here. So he should be, because effectively he won without a top-spin forehand as he nurses his right wrist back to full health.

Murray was the first to admit that his game will be a work in progress over the next few weeks, but his time away had not dampened his court craft and intelligence and Ginepri was frequently left to curse his inability to take advantage of the weakness.

“I thought I played pretty well considering the circumstances,” Murray said. “I wanted to go and practise the things that I had been doing. I thought I did that well. I came into the net a lot, served well and was just happy with the way that I played.”

The Scot, whose ranking has slipped to No 14 in his absence, had warned people not to expect too much, having not stepped on to a court competitively since suffering the injury in the first round of the Hamburg Masters Series event against Filippo Volandri, of Italy, on May 15.

But apart from the forehand, which for the most part he blocked or chipped, his game looked in great shape as he teased errors out of Ginepri. The American, a semi-finalist at the US Open in 2005, is struggling for confidence, so it was perhaps fortunate for Murray that he should be the first opponent. Ginepri's effective but limited game plays into the hands of someone with the shot-making ability of Murray and the 20-year-old befuddled his rival with a series of short backhands before rifling passing shots down the backhand flank.

There were a couple of wincing and disgruntled looks towards Brad Gilbert, his coach, who sat alongside Andy's brother, Jamie, but when he needed to produce, he did, and he will play the unheralded Fabio Fognini, of Italy, in the second round today.

"I've been told to expect some pain," Murray said. "I'll be interested to see what it feels like in the morning. But I've been told by the doctors and the physios I'm not going to reinjure it by swinging harder. When I feel the time is right, when I need to, I'll do that."

He did not need to against Ginepri. After trading breaks early in the first set, a short backhand with no pace prompted another error from the American to give Murray a 5-4 lead and he served out the set with ease. A loss of concentration at the start of the second left him 3-0 down, but he reeled off five successive games. Ginepri held to force him to serve it out, but Murray was up to the challenge.

"A lot of guys on the tour will play 90 per cent of their shots, say, just as a slice backhand," Murray said. "But I was using my backhand as a strength and kind of blocking a lot of forehands. You just have to try and find a way around it. I gain confidence in every match that I play, I can keep hitting the ball harder."

"I just want to play some matches and get ready for the US Open. It's been a long time, the longest I've been out. I just want to get my match fitness back and hope my wrist gets better every day. I am enjoying playing, not putting any pressure on myself."

Murray looks on bright side despite defeat

Simon Cambers in Cincinnati

Published at 12:00AM, August 15 2007

The latest stage in Andy Murray's comeback from injury lasted only 48 minutes last night as he was beaten 6-1, 6-2 by Marcos Baghdatis, of Cyprus, in the first round of the Masters Series event here.

Having returned after 12 weeks out with a right wrist injury last week in Montreal, where he lost in the second round, Murray had hoped that he would be able to play closer to 100 per cent yesterday. There were some encouraging signs, particularly on the forehand that he hit with much more pace than a week ago, when he often had to resort to chipping, but it is clear that the rest of his game is nowhere near its best.

Despite the defeat, Murray said he felt that he had made strides since he was beaten by Fabio Fognini, the world No 139 from Italy, last week. "I was hitting the ball harder today off my forehand and hitting top-spin returns," Murray said. "It was definitely better but there are a lot of things that I wasn't really doing well. I was not moving fluidly, which is normally the one thing that I do really well. Obviously I wasn't hitting my forehand 100 per cent. A combination of those two things and also playing against a great player like Marcos doesn't help."

Murray said that he had made the decision to play here the morning after his defeat in Montreal, having discussed it with Brad Gilbert, his coach, and his physiotherapists. "I was

hitting the ball harder and didn't have any bad reactions and decided I was going to come," he said. "It was feeling better, and I guess it's pretty much 100 per cent now."

Twelve months ago, Murray beat Roger Federer, the world No 1, on his way to the quarter-finals here, but last night his game was at sixes and sevens. The Scot didn't help himself by serving erratically while his reluctance to go flat out on his forehand allowed Baghdatis to dictate.

After holding serve in the opening game, Murray was broken to love in the third game and won only ten points in the first set. He made an encouraging start to the second set, but once he was broken in the sixth game, Baghdatis cruised to victory. He will now meet Juan Ignacio Chela, of Argentina, who beat Tim Henman, the British No 2, in the first round on Monday.

Gilbert and Jamie Murray, Andy's brother, trudged off after the match and Murray admitted that it must be tough for them. "After the start to the year that I had and then to be in this position is not the easiest thing," he said. "But I'd like to hope that they'd be supporting me and wanting me to get better. It's not fun for anyone watching me lose matches like that."

Murray lowers expectations for New York as reality bites

Simon Cambers in Cincinnati

Published at 12:00AM, August 16 2007

Such is his love for the US Open, Andy Murray will do everything within his power to be back at full fitness for the grand-slam tournament, which begins a week on Monday. But, after disappointing performances in his first two tournaments after 12 weeks out with an injured right wrist, realism is setting in for the 20-year-old Scot and he has admitted that his expectations for the event at Flushing Meadows are about as low as they could be.

His 6-1, 6-2 defeat by Marcos Baghdatis, of Cyprus, in the first round of the Masters Series event here on Tuesday was another indication that, although the tendon injury to his right wrist that caused him to miss the French Open and Wimbledon appears to be improving every day, Murray is a long way off regaining the form that took him inside the world's top ten only a few months ago.

He will take solace from having been able to hit his forehand with much more pace against Baghdatis than in his comeback event in Montreal last week, but though he says results mean little to him at this stage, with each defeat his confidence is taking a knock and until he can play flat out he will be hugely vulnerable, even to players that he would usually expect to swat aside.

Murray will try to make big strides by playing in the Pilot Pen event in New Haven, Connecticut, starting on Sunday, in a bid to increase his match fitness, but a similar run in the US Open to last year, when he reached the fourth round, appears unlikely.

“Right now obviously it’s not looking great,” he said. “With the injury you have to be a bit more aggressive. You need to try and take the weaker forehand out of play a bit and try to serve and volley a bit. Go for shots up the line that you might not normally try. That’s just something that I’ve got to get used to for the next month or so and then, hopefully, I will be able to start playing well again.”

An early defeat for Murray in New York would push his ranking down from its present position of No 16 but the Scot said he had to take a long-term view. “There are results that will hurt you really bad sometimes and get you down,” he said. “But I have to stay positive because I’m hoping that it’s going to come back sooner rather than later. I’m just trying to get myself back on to the tour and used to playing against these guys again and then, hopefully, I’ll be doing that better in a couple of weeks.”

The tennis will come back in time but while the injury is healing, Murray appears to be struggling mentally. Compared to the player who successfully defended his San Jose title in February and then reached back-to-back semi-finals at the Masters Series events in Indian Wells and Miami, it was almost painful to watch him play Baghdatis. The Cypriot, ranked No 18 in the world, would have been a tough opponent even if Murray had been at his best but though the Scot hit much harder on the forehand, his movement was laboured and at times he looked as if he would rather be anywhere else.

“Your swing changes a bit when you’re not hitting for a while and you’re obviously not swinging as hard,” Murray said. “It’s just getting used to swinging hard consistently all the time and then when my swing is back to normal, I should be hitting at a consistent pace again.

“Sometimes when the ball is in a different position I might slice it or I might hit it a bit different. But when I’ve got enough time I was trying to hit up on it more. I guess it’s to be expected. Obviously, I’d rather be playing 100 per cent and playing my best tennis, but I know it’s going to take a bit of time.

“I guess [the wrist] is pretty much 100 per cent now. It’s a good sign. I’m making a decision to go [to New Haven] and play and try to win some matches and get my confidence back and my movement back and see exactly where my game’s at going into the US Open.”

Murray’s return proves to be well timed

Neil Harman, Tennis Correspondent, in New York

Published at 12:00AM, August 25 2007

Having spent the past five months waiting for Andy Murray to be able to play again, it came as no surprise that Brad Gilbert, who normally cannot sit still for five seconds, was in a sanguine, thoughtful mood. There was not even the requisite coffee to hand.

“It’s been a bummer, a downer, but Andy’s letting it fly a lot more in practice, he is over his injuries and there’s no reason why he shouldn’t have a good tournament,” Murray’s coach said, exactly the fillip that British tennis required after the retirement of Tim Henman that has led to waves of sympathy being offered to anyone with a British accent in the city.

It is as if a member of the Royal Family has passed away, and so Murray’s moves are being monitored more closely than usual. If the levels of frustration that he has endured since the freak injury to his right wrist on a cold day in Hamburg in May are intense, it is difficult to imagine the extent of the pins and needles in Gilbert’s body.

This is a man who has never understood the meaning of the word rest and yet not in almost 20 years, since his own ankle injury in 1988 required eight months of hibernation, has he ever been in need of so much patience.

When asked to play doctor yesterday, Gilbert said: “I’m not inside his wrist.” But the sense is that if he was, he would have persuaded himself to push a little more than his charge, who flew to Britain last week to visit the doctors who have nursed him through another of the physical setbacks from which he has drawn remarkable strength.

“The doctors and physios were telling him to give it a shot - if it was me, I’d much rather give it a shot and get hurt as opposed to waiting and maybe you hurt it anyway,” he said. “You just never know, there’s no sign, it’s tough. You have to be careful with a wrist because it’s such an integral part of a tennis player’s body. A lot of players have been out for significant periods of time with this injury and I think it’s because of the different strings in the rackets these days, and also the fact that the boys play with so much more power and spin.”

Since that day when his face was racked with pain, the British No 1 has missed two grand-slam tournaments, seen his ranking rise to No 8 in the world and fall back to No 19 - its present position - and played three matches in two tournaments, winning one against Robbie Ginepri, of the United States, in Montreal. He is now coming to terms with the retirement of Henman, whose legacy he would love to emulate.

“Andy has been banged up with one thing after another since Indian Wells, [the Pacific Life Open in March, when he damaged his shoulder and ankle when he dived to try to make a volley in the quarter-final against Tommy Haas],” Gilbert said.

“It’s been a case of - why is all this bulls*** happening to me? But it does happen, you deal with it and you move on. All he ever wanted to do was go out there and have two good practice days in a row without any pain in his body and that’s how it has been here.

“He wanted to go back to Britain last week and find out for sure that there was nothing wrong. The response was positive. Realistically, we just want to get through one match but I feel he is capable of having a good tournament. He hasn’t forgotten how to play tennis.”

Which is perhaps just as well because the game has moved on apace in the past four months, not least in that Novak Djokovic, Murray’s fellow 20-year-old, from Serbia, in winning his second Masters Series event of the year when he beat Roger Federer in

Montreal earlier this month, cemented his place as the No 3 player in the world behind the Swiss, the defending US Open champion, and Rafael Nadal.

Murray is regarded as the next-best player. All he wants to do is be able to prove it.

Murray takes first hesitant steps and is quickly back into his stride

Neil Harman, Tennis Correspondent, New York

Published at 12:00AM, August 28 2007

On the court on which he has left the contents of his stomach and played some of the most inspired tennis of his life, Andy Murray was content just to strike the ball with a real purpose yesterday. Feeling his way back into the sporting mainstream, Murray won his first-round match at the US Open in a manner that will have reverberated through the locker-room like an electrical surge.

Murray's 6-2, 6-3, 6-0 victory over Pablo Cuevas, a Uruguayan qualifier, was his first in a grand-slam tournament since he defeated Juan Ignacio Chela, of Argentina, in the third round of the Australian Open on January 20. That seems half a lifetime ago, during which time the 20-year-old from Dunblane has endured more misfortunes with his body, only for the setbacks to have hardened his mental resolution.

"It's quite hard to describe my emotions because when you don't play for such a long time at an acceptable level, it's tough to stay positive," Murray said. "That result means so much to me – more than a lot of results I had earlier in the year."

You did not need a degree in sports psychology to appreciate what this small step meant for the British No 1. He sat for a good minute in his chair at the end of the match – which was watched by Roberto Forzoni, the Italian psychologist with whom he has been working – in deep contemplation. For him to emerge in the second round – in which he will play Jonas Björkman, the oldest man in the draw at 35 – is a considerable relief, as is the fact that the right wrist he flexed as he walked back from changeovers stayed rock-like in both defence and attack.

With Murray, who is a master of subtleties and spins, it is difficult to know whether the fact that he did not strike out forcefully that often was a sign of weakness or, more likely, that he neither needed nor wanted to show his hand too quickly on what is another in a long line of comebacks from physical trial. It helps the mindset to be in familiar surroundings and that is undeniably true of the intimate Grand-stand Court at Flushing Meadows.

In the first round here two years ago, against Andrei Pavel, of Romania, Murray reacted violently to a sharp intake of his liquid refreshment, was sick on the court before winning in five sets. A year later, in the third round against Fernando González, of Chile, he played one of the finest five-set matches of his life. He did not know what to expect, either from himself or Cuevas, the world No 129, who had defeated Jamie Baker, his fellow Scot, in the final round of qualifying.

His first trademark “Yeh” – the sharp shout he gives when a shot feels particularly right – came in the second game of the match, a set in which the only blemish was a serving horror in the seventh game. When he resisted putting away his first overhead at the start of the second set, preferring to let the ball bounce and then sweep it into court, one wondered if he harboured doubts, but by the end of that set and in the third, he was thumping them into the crowd, once finding Brad Gilbert, his coach.

Watching closely, John Lloyd, the Great Britain Davis Cup captain, looked mightily relieved. When he named his squad yesterday morning for next month’s World Group qualifier against Croatia, he feared that Mario Ancic would be part of the opposition. Then came news that Ancic was forfeiting his place here because of a small fracture of his shoulder and will miss the tie altogether.

Lloyd’s round of golf on Sunday was interrupted when a familiar face – and distinctive hairstyle – came riding into view on his initialised cart. Donald Trump, the billionaire real estate developer and host of *The Apprentice*, the American forerunner to Sir Alan Sugar’s replica on the BBC, was touring one of his signature courses and is a long-time friend of Lloyd, who often plays in the pro-am tennis events at Trump’s parties.

“Who’s this guy?” Trump asked of one of Lloyd’s playing partners. “That’s Jamie Baker, a decent golfer,” Lloyd replied, upon which the Scot promptly duffed three successive shots in the rough. Baker was named in the Davis Cup team with Murray, his brother, Jamie, and Tim Henman, for his sentimental farewell.

Murray passes first endurance test against wiles of veteran Bjorkman

Published at 12:00AM, August 31 2007

Andy Murray is 20 and moved to some of his shots like a 35-year-old; Jonas Björkman is 35 and often bounced around like a joey. The upshot of a second-round match at the US Open that kept spinning on its axis was success for the British No 1 and another stride forward after so many weeks spent trying to find a gear other than reverse.

The Scot defeated Björkman, who had lost only one of his previous 13 matches to have gone the five-set distance, 5-7, 6-3, 6-1, 4-6, 6-1. Murray will appreciate what a significant moment this was as he grapples with grand-slam tournament nuances again. If only he

could play all his matches here on the Grandstand Court at Flushing Meadows that has such a resonance for him.

Murray was said to be upset to be scheduled as first match at 11am, remembering perhaps how slowly he started against Nikolay Davydenko, of Russia, in his fourth-round match last year. Unlike Brad Gilbert, his coach, who is often in the gym at 5am, the Scot is not exactly a morning person.

Murray's supporters feared — given Björkman's record and the fact that he had not played a fifth set since the Australian Open tussle with Rafael Nadal in January — that he was certain to fade after losing the fourth set. When he snaffled the Swede's serve for a second time in the fifth, a huge grin broke over his face as if he did not quite know what to make of it all. These are cautiously optimistic times, for so much of the British No 1's game is in great nick, the backhand pass has not lost any of its cutting edge in the past five months, his timing does not seem to have suffered, and he has not lost the knack of over-egging the drop shot.

However, his first serve percentage certainly needs to be stepped up and though the unforced error count against him was 64, much of that can be put down to ring rustiness. As Gilbert said on the day before the championship: "He has not forgotten how to play tennis."

Now Murray plays Lee Hyung Taik, of South Korea, who caused the greatest upset of the tournament in beating Guillermo Cañas, the Argentinian who defeated Roger Federer in successive tournaments on American hard courts earlier in the year, 7-5, 7-5, 6-3.

Federer has encountered many noises on his way to his position of dominance — many serene, some strident, mostly sweet — but he has never been treated to the "bulldog bark". His first exposure to it tomorrow, when he faces John Isner, the 6ft 10in American, in the third round may not be music to his ears.

Isner's bow on the tour proper at the Legg Mason Classic in Washington last month coincided with Tim Henman's arrival in search of summer sustenance. The collision of the two in the first round, a match that Henman lost in the three sets, was probably the defeat that decided his retirement course.

Isner played for the University of Georgia, whose mascot is the bulldog, and there are going to be several classmates, members of his coaching fraternity and family in the Arthur Ashe Stadium to see how this skyscraper of a player contends with the world No 1 and defending champion.

Murray loses in New York

Barry Flatman, Sunday Times Tennis Correspondent

Published: 2 September 2007

By virtue of his feisty temperament and spirited determination, Andy Murray will never be a person who derives anything but abject disappointment from defeat against a player he knows is beatable, be it a Grand Slam tournament or otherwise.

However it took the young Scot just a few minutes to rationalise his third round exit from the US Open at the safe but largely unspectacular hands of Hyung-Taik Lee. On court he was the complete angry young man as he battled for survival; repeatedly cursing his shortcomings, arguing with umpire Steve Ullrich and even kicking a rubbish bucket to vent his frustration.

In the time it took to exchange just a few words with coach Brad Gilbert, grab a shower and pull on a dry shirt and shorts, he was able to gather his thoughts sufficiently to view the whole Flushing Meadows experience as a positive. Full marks to the diligence of sports psychologist Roberto Forzoni who transformed Murray from the borders of adolescent depression just days before the tournament to a logical adult who could realise better times and results can be only just around the corner.

Unfortunate though Murray's 6-3,6-3,2-6,7-5 exit against the 31 year-old Korean, it should be remembered that just a couple of weeks ago he cut a dismal figure on the courts of Montreal and Cincinnati, unsure whether it was safe to hit a forehand with full force after missing most of the summer because of the wrist ligaments he damaged in Hamburg in May. And in the week before the US Open began he chose not to contest the tournament in New Haven, viewing it as quite simply a waste of time.

Before his injury Murray would have treated any immediate autopsy of a defeat as an intrusion and with most enquiries treated with a degree of contempt. Now he managed to answer plausibly in a manner not depicting that stereotype British player who is repeatedly satisfied with mediocrity but instead seeing where the experience of New York three matches in five days fitted into a far bigger picture.

"I would have rather done better obviously but it's been a long time since I felt like I could sort of the play at this level," he said. "My game is still nowhere near where I would like and I was making a lot of mistakes that I don't normally make. However it's not a bad result considering the circumstances."

Lee, seasoned enough to have been the semi-final opponent of Tim Henman when he collected the only British title of his career in the long since defunct tournament of Brighton back in 2000, may not be the most outlandish performer on the ATP tour but he is currently playing the most consistent tennis of his career and has enjoyed far more practice than Murray on American cement in the past few weeks.

The Korean was a semi-finalist in Los Angeles and reached the quarters of both the Washington and Indianapolis tournaments. Earlier this year Murray recovered from a poor start to beat him on route to retaining his San Jose title but this match was a case of one man being fully match toned and another still feeling his way back into the fray.

"It took me maybe five or six games to get going and then I gave myself a little bit too much work to do in the end," said Murray who will now head back to Britain and begin preparations for the upcoming Davis Cup tie against Croatia at Wimbledon that he views as the potential high point of his competitive year. "If I had taken one of my many chances in the first set and maybe got myself a set ahead, I might have loosened up and started to play better. My tennis maybe wasn't at its best but physically I was in good shape and that's one of the positives I have to take."

The fact that Murray did not feel a single twinge from his wrist throughout the initial win over Pablo Cuevas, the five set examination against Jonas Bjorkman and this two hours 45 minutes long encounter is reason to be optimistic. What he lacked was consistency, not just on his return and ground strokes but also on his serve that was so effective in his two previous wins.

While Lee did not aim to fire aces, he was steady throughout whereas Murray struggled noticeably from the service line in the second set but found a rich vein of form in the third only to let it slip again in the fourth.

Initially it seemed as though he was on the way to another five setter after breaking the Korean in the opening game of what transpired the closing set but an alarmingly weak game allowed his opponent to break back to love and from then on the signs were ominous.

Showing fine resistance, Murray saved match points in two separate but after Lee pounced on a ball flying gently off the net cord to hit a winning pass and Murray error hit the net to present a third. The Scot realised heroics were the only option left to him and charging the net in search of a volley, he could only watch as a final ball flew past out of his reach.

Now he is looking forward to fully recapturing his game and concluded: "I think now it shouldn't take too long because I'll be able to go on the practice court in a couple of days and act like I was playing a match; hitting my forehand 100% and moving around properly. I think by the time of the Davis Cup at Wimbledon I should be timing the ball much better."

Andy Murray leads by example with battling win

Neil Harman, Tennis Correspondent

Published at 12:00AM, September 22 2007

One day – and it is going to have to happen sooner than one thinks for the sport's sake in this country – British crowds will take Andy Murray to their collective bosom as firmly as they have Tim Henman down the years. The process will be markedly hastened by performances the like of which the 20-year-old produced in Great Britain's cause yesterday.

In providing, with his 3-6, 6-4, 6-2, 4-6, 6-3 victory over Marin Cilic, the platform for Henman to strut his stuff on Wimbledon's No 1 court and give Britain, surely, a conclusive 2-0 lead in their bid to win a Davis Cup World Group place in 2008, Murray explored every inch of the character that has taken him into the top ten and will do again before too long.

The fluttering caused by his admission that this competition needs to sit well with his solo commitments became a full-scale LTA cluck with his insipid start against Cilic, of Croatia, who, with injury to Mario Ancic, the obstinacy of Ivo Karlovic and the terribly-timed illness of Ivan Ljubicic, came from possible team member to senior player in the space of three weeks. Murray lost the first set in 34 minutes – a study in nerves on a blustery day.

Murray looked confused, which may have had something to do with the fact that Brad Gilbert, his American coach, was wearing a Great Britain tracksuit. But he was playing more securely in defence, causing the courageous Cilic to overhit, and snatched the second set, eased through the third – apart from the seventh game, when he double-faulted three times – only to slacken in the fourth, in which his fightback was stalled by a dubious call when he felt he had levelled at 3-3. Cilic, playing his first live rubber on foreign soil, And so to the eighth five-set match of Murray's career. He lost the first three, with eyebrows raised as to his durability, but had won three of the past four, including his second-round success at the US Open last month against Jonas Björkman, of Sweden. He started this one like a house on fire, taking the Cilic serve in the second game with a half-volleyed forehand from the baseline in response to a thunderous backhand by the Croat. And, from the moment he survived break point in the next game, of the 16 service points required to secure the match, he missed only two first serves.

Tim Henman then took Great Britain to a 2-0 lead over Croatia in the Davis Cup as he beat Roko Karanusic 6-4, 6-3, 6-3. He may play again in the tie, and may even play in the doubles today, but yesterday's effort might have been his last competitive singles match as a professional tennis player.

ATP summons Andy Murray after claims over match-fixing

Neil Harman, Tennis Correspondent

Published at 12:00AM, October 10 2007

Andy Murray will be summoned by the ATP to reveal any evidence he has of match-fixing in the light of his statement yesterday. "It's difficult to prove if someone has tanked a match or not tried," he said. "They can try their best until the last couple of games in each set and then make mistakes, hit a couple of double faults and that's it. It [match-fixing] is pretty disappointing, but everyone knows it goes on."

The British No 1 was adding his voice to the debate about potential corruption that has cast such a pall over the sport.

The first tennis Integrity Unit is in the process of being set up by the four stakeholders in the sport, including the grand-slam tournaments, which are greatly troubled by recent stories about approaches being made to players in locker-rooms at their venues.

At a recent ATP Player Council meeting, the idea of separate locker-rooms being built in tennis stadiums for players only was raised — with no coaches, family members or hangers-on being allowed entry, leading to a vastly reduced risk of sensitive information leaking out. Players will be given 48 hours to tell the authorities if they are approached about match-fixing and risk punishment if they fail to do so. The 48-hour rule will be adopted by the board of the ATP when it meets in November.

Murray, who plays Evgeny Korolev, of Russia, in the first round of the Kremlin Cup tournament in Moscow today, got to the heart of the matter when he said: "There are some guys who come to tournaments every week and out of their first-round loser's cheque they have to pay their air fares. A career lasts probably ten or 12 years and you have to make all your money while you're still playing. But it's not really acceptable."

Andy Murray breathes easier in Madrid after clearing the air with Rafael Nadal

Neil Harman, Tennis Correspondent, in Madrid

Published at 12:00AM, October 15 2007

Andy Murray and Rafael Nadal had a five-minute cards-on-the-table chat yesterday, one of many such conversations likely to occur in the bowels of the Pabell?n de Cristal this week, as

the elite men gather for the first time after a month in which their sport has been sidetracked by the kind of headlines it could have done without.

Rather than the post-US Open period being a time to inhale clean air before the stuffy indoor season, the atmosphere has been polluted with stories of alleged fixes, illegal approaches, marked men and a raft of suspect matches that tend to throw up the same names, some of whom will figure in the penultimate Masters Series tournament of the year.

Nadal, hero of Spanish tennis and the 2005 champion here, took exception to a couple of things the British No 1 said – and then rescinded – about players knowing what was going on in the sport's dimly-lit corridors. The word "stupid" was used, though the world No 2 meant it in the manner of someone speaking out of turn rather than a blot on Murray's sanity.

Anyway, the pair – who could meet in the third round of the Madrid Masters series event – put that behind them here. "We were joking about it," Murray said. "I don't think it's as big an issue as it's been made out anyway. I explained the whole situation and he understands where I'm coming from. Rafa has been involved with the press for a long time and he knows it's easy for them to change words and not report the question asked and just put the answers."

There are more questions than answers in the case of anti-corruption and those expecting quick responses will be disappointed. It is just as well this tournament has come along when it has – an opportunity to be reacquainted with sport for sport's sake. Murray's record in this year's Masters Series events is two semi-finals, three tumbles at the first hurdle (one was the agonising defeat by Filippo Volandri, of Italy, in Hamburg when his right wrist gave way), one at the second fence and one no-show. The Scot reached the third round here last year and should have defeated Novak Djokovic, having won the first set 6-1.

Djokovic celebrated his fifth tournament success of the year in Vienna yesterday, further proof of the Serb's fabulous improvement. Murray's visit to Moscow last week was a let-down, with defeat by Djokovic's compatriot, Janko Tipsarevic, in the second round, in a match in which the Scot lost the last five games.

Today, Murray's opponent is Radek Stepanek, of the Czech Republic, on whom no sane person would place money, for his entire career has been so erratic, not least when the pair met in the second round of Wimbledon in 2005, a match Murray won in straight sets and after which Stepanek was torn off a strip by Tony Pickard, his coach for that grass-court season.

Interestingly, Murray's practice session yesterday was watched by not one coach, but two. Brad Gilbert was prowling as usual, but in the company of Leon Smith, Murray's first coach, who knows his game, and his moods, better than anyone. Smith, the head of the 16-and-under boys at the LTA, is a different voice, whose lilt is possibly a touch more easy on the ear.

Andy Murray regains lost honour for Britain

Neil Harman, Tennis Correspondent, in Madrid

Published at 12:00AM, October 17 2007

The Argentinians are promising Great Britain the rough ride to top all rough rides in the Davis Cup tie between the nations in Buenos Aires in February. Juan Ignacio Chela had better hope that Andy Murray's mood come the time of that unappealing prospect is less unbending than it was last night.

A year ago, after a combustible match here, David Nalbandian turned on Tim Henman, saying that to call him a gentleman was "the worst rubbish there is". The 2002 Wimbledon finalist has been equally dismissive about Britain's chances when the nations cross swords in a World Group first-round tie. "I don't think you have any chance," Nalbandian said yesterday. "It is going to be hot, the clay will be playing really slow, the crowd is going to be noisy, you will not have experienced anything like it."

Well, that is all very well and Nalbandian is entitled to his opinion, one hardened by the prickly relations between the countries since news was released of Britain's desire to extend its territorial claims around the Falkland Islands — scene of a conflict between the nations 25 years ago — to 350 miles from the present 200.

There was an impenetrable exclusion zone around Murray last night, as his 6-1, 6-3 margin of victory and 34 winners to four illustrated. Chela did manage to break once to make the second set more respectable, but he was constantly undone by controlled brilliance of the highest order, exemplified in the fifth game of the set when, in successive points, Murray chased a lob and struck a forehand winner and then drove a backhand down the line from an improbable spot, which brought the crowd to its feet.

Murray in this form is as good as anybody in the game and the pity this year is that he has had so little opportunity to prove it, what with his litany of injuries. "Before my [wrist] injury I was really consistent, winning a lot of matches and playing great shots — that's what I enjoy doing," he said. "When I came back I wasn't able to do that. It has just taken me a bit of time to get back to that level."

Tomorrow, Murray is scheduled to play either Rafael Nadal, the No 2 seed, or Marcos Baghdatis.

Chela's destruction apart, it was another telling day of Argentine progress. Nalbandian overcame the loss of the first set to Arnaud Clément, Juan Mónaco beat Tommy Haas, the No 11 seed, and Agustin Calleri defeated Dmitry Tursunov in three sets.

Andy Murray stretches Rafael Nadal to breaking point

Neil Harman, Tennis Correspondent, in Madrid

Published at 12:00AM, October 19 2007

Rafael Nadal loves his on-court celebrations and they do not come more exuberant than the one last night as he tore the sweatbands from his wrists, leapt around like a dervish and raised his fists to the heavens. And he had simply won a third-round match at the Madrid Masters Series event, which goes to show how close Andy Murray came to yanking the red carpet from beneath his feet.

Nadal has been involved in some real humdingers this year — the Wimbledon final against Roger Federer takes some beating — but of his matches against anyone other than the world No 1 and the five-day extravaganza against Robin Söderling at the All England Club, two are standouts.

The first came against Murray in the fourth round of the Australian Open, when the Spaniard won in five sets on a night when blankets and hip flasks were the order of the early morning. But there was nothing remotely chill about the Pabellón de Cristal last night. It rocked and rolled in tune with tennis of the very highest quality, shot-making of incredible variety, rallies that took the breath away and in which Murray came out on top so often that it was almost impossible to believe he lost in straight sets, 7-6, 6-4.

“He is an unbelievable talent,” Nadal said of the 20-year-old Briton. “And he has that most important thing — he knows how to play.” Murray deserved better, the home crowd knew it, for they do not accord the vanquished standing ovations and yet that is how Murray departed the court after 2hr 16min, to a future a lot rosier than it has looked for months.

Of course, he will be shattered, he despises losing. But he has proved again that he belongs at this level. And, once more, he had Nadal on the ropes, ducking and weaving, but the Scot could not quite administer a resounding coup de grâce.

“There are a few things I have to work on for next year but it’s pleasing to play at this level again,” Murray said. “When you play one of the top five guys, you have to convert. When my first serve was working well, the other guy didn’t have a chance, but it was not consistent enough.”

There were eight break points in the first set, of which Murray capitalised on the sixth to break to love after Nadal had broken him to love to serve for it. From a mini-break down, Nadal steadied himself to snatch the tie-break, the final point of which was a stunning forehand winner from the world No 2 after Murray had not quite put enough on a forehand volley and was forced to play a flicked overhead that Nadal scampered to reach and put away. It was tumultuous stuff.

Often, when Nadal has his nose in front, he goes on to pummel the opposition, but he has the utmost respect for the British No 1. Murray broke serve in the first game of the second set and, after he immediately lost his own serve, he had the temerity to break again. Having survived four break points to lead 4-2 in the second, Murray suddenly led 40-15 on the Spaniard's serve, within two points of taking an iron grip. His backhand had been almost flawless, but he balked on two in succession, missing the tramlines. The wonder of Nadal's play is how he is able to conjure winners from defensive positions, how he can stay in rallies when most other players would give up on them, how he can reach drop shots that others would not dare to dream that they could lay a racket on. And he is supposed to be wondering about how fit he is having missed the past two months with tendinitis in his knees. Heaven help the rest when he is fully fit.

Murray fired up for bid to grab last China place

Neil Harman, Tennis correspondent

Published at 12:00AM, October 26 2007

At the start of this week, 20 players were still in with a mathematical shout of laying claim to one of the final three spots for the prestigious Tennis Masters Cup in Shanghai next month for which the first three – Roger Federer, Rafael Nadal and Novak Djokovic – were guaranteed before the first leaf of autumn fell. This morning, Andy Murray remains one of those salivating few.

Murray's 6-2, 6-4 victory over Lukas Dlouhy, of the Czech Republic, which guaranteed him a place in the quarter-finals of the St Petersburg Open, was enough to bolster his hopes, so emphatically endorsed in the first three months of the year and now, suddenly, revived again in the autumn. It is very much nip and tuck.

After his success over the world No 138 – a victory that had to be eked out like so many at the time of year when legs and minds are in turmoil – Murray will face Dmitry Tursunov, of Russia, a formidable foe at any time.

It is always problematic to look beyond the next opponent but the fact that Nikolay Davydenko, the No 1 seed, who might have been Murray's semi-final opponent, bowed out 1-6, 7-5, 6-1 yesterday to Marin Cilic, of Croatia, gives more optimism to the crystal ball-gazers.

It is supposed that the British No 1, who started the week at No 18 in the ATP Race, the yearly form guide on which places in the Masters Cup are determined, and is now 48 points behind eighth place, needed to win the St Petersburg title to keep his hopes alive. As things stand, he has one further event, the BNP Paribas Masters at Paris Bercy next week, to accumulate the necessary points.

But, with so many people vying for so few lucrative spots, it is likely to be one of the hardest-fought events of the year.

Federer has not played the tournament for the past three years, indeed since he lost to Tim Henman in the quarter-finals in 2003. In his corner this time, as *The Times* revealed last week, will be Johan De Beer, the South African physiotherapist who may be tempted to stay with Federer on a more extensive basis but is also believed to be attracted by a significant offer to work for the LTA in its medical department.

Attempting to cash in on the present hype, the ATP launches its latest marketing blitz to play on the emotions of those who may watch the sport intermittently but do not have a real passion for what is at its heart.

A couple of years ago, the mantra was “New Balls Please”. In 2008 and beyond, the message will be “Feel It”, by which the ATP seeks to promote the finest athletes in the world; Murray, for one, will be pictured with flames licking from the back of one of his trademark double-fisted backhands. “Sometimes when you watch tennis on TV you don’t understand the intensity that the players are playing with,” he said. “I like to think that when I hit the ball, there’s a bit of fire coming off.”

Andy Murray snatches victory from jaws of defeat

After looking dead and buried, the British No 1 reaches the final of this year's penultimate Masters Series event

David Parsons

Published: 28 October 2007

ASIDE from savouring the joy of victory, nothing pleases Andy Murray more than proving others wrong in their assessment of his capabilities. Just a few weeks ago the young Scot's hopes of reaching the Tennis Masters Cup were rated as minimal following those weeks lost to an injured wrist in the summer.

Now with one final and the year's concluding Masters Series event in Paris remaining, Murray is surging through on the rails with all the distinguishing features of a rank outsider with the winning post in his sights. After refusing to buckle despite flirting within two points of defeat, the British No 1's St Petersburg Open semi-final win does

not just put him within reach of the third title of his career today when he faces Fernando Verdasco of Spain in the final; victory will leave him in equal 10th place in the race for one of the eight Shanghai places on offer and within striking distance of eighth-placed Tommy Haas.

Resolute campaigner that the second-seeded 20-year-old unquestionably is, he overcame a distinct qualification rival in Russia's Mikhail Youzhny, winning through 6-2 5-7 7-6 after two hours and 31 minutes. Murray's cause seemed lost as he trailed 5-2 in the concluding set as the labours of an arduous quarter-final less than 24 hours earlier seemed to take its toll.

Youzhny, at 19 in the world ranked three places below Murray but vastly more experienced, was not only playing on home territory but had the added bonus of being handed victory in Friday's quarter-final when opponent Philipp Kohlschreiber retired ill after a set. But Murray's determination finally saw him through, Youzhny eventually gifting victory in the tie-break with a double fault.

Even for Murray to still be in contention for a first ever place at the year-ending men's tour finale is an accomplishment worthy of praise. Unlike the actual world rankings, which are based on a rolling year's round assessment, the race for places in Shanghai is based on an 18-tournament formula; the four Grand Slam championships, the nine Masters Series events and each player's five other best performances in tour events that have a sliding scale of points rewarded.

Murray's wrist injury ruled him out of the French Open and Wimbledon. In addition he was ruled out of the Monte Carlo Masters Series event after injuring himself playing doubles with brother Jamie, and was forced to retire in Hamburg's first round as he hurt the wrist against Filippo Volandri of Italy. When he recaptured his self-belief at the US Open a couple of months ago, he viewed the remaining tournaments as events where he could hone his game for a brisk start in 2008. However, the faltering form of numerous rivals coupled with inspired Murray play has rejuvenated hope of him becoming the first British player to qualify for the Tennis Masters Cup since Tim Henman travelled to Houston three years ago.

On Friday, Ivan Ljubicic, a rival for a place in Shanghai, lost in Lyon and Tomas Berdych later followed suit in Basle. The semi-final demise of Marcos Baghdatis to Jarkko Nieminen in yesterday's semi-final of the Swiss tournament effectively ended the Cypriot's hopes.

Magnificent Andy Murray claims St Petersburg Open

Times Online and Agencies

Published at 5:13PM, October 28 2007

Andy Murray took a huge step towards booking his place in the prestigious end-of-season Masters Cup with a handsome victory over Fernando Verdasco to clinch his second ATP Tour title of the year in the St Petersburg Open.

The British number one ran out a 6-2, 6-3 winner over his Spanish rival and is now ideally set to challenge for the final place in the Shanghai event, which is open to the top eight in the ATP 2007 Race.

Victory in Russia, in his first appearance at the tournament, means he is now just three qualifying points behind current number eight Tommy Haas with only one ranking event - the Masters Series in Paris next week - to play.

Murray, as he seems to do in big matches, settled quickly into his stride and won the first set at a canter in his third final appearance of 2007.

Both men won their first service games but Murray found a way through in just the third game, breaking a nervy-looking Verdasco who produced an unforced error on his backhand to hand his opponent the game.

The Spaniard threatened to break straight back, holding a 0-30 advantage on the Murray serve, but the Scot battled back well to hold on, closing out the game with a fine drop shot - a sign of his supreme confidence having gifted Dmitry Tursunov a handful of points attempting a similar tactic earlier in the competition.

Two more games followed serve before Murray engineered a second break, producing some bold attacking tennis to take a three-game lead. One nerveless service game later and the first set was his.

The second set has often been Murray's stumbling block - as witnessed in his epic clash with Mikhail Youzhny in yesterday's semi-final, but this time he broke at the first attempt, continuing his dominance of the Spaniard by holding his own serve to love.

Trailing 1-2, Verdasco took Murray to deuce on his own serve with some intelligently-placed shots but was again unable to find the consistency to actually break serve.

Murray spurned three break points in a mammoth game which Verdasco eventually held to make it 3-2, but he found the break when it really mattered, converting on his first match point for his second title of the season.

Andy Murray runs into Richard Gasquet roadblock on route to China

A Correspondent in Paris

Published at 12:00AM, November 3 2007

Scotsmen should know better than to walk into Parisian sporting arenas wearing white shirts this autumn. Andy Murray's attempt to qualify for the eighth available place in the Tennis Masters Cup did not end in surrender. Ultimately, however, the resilience that has seen the British No 1 stage an improbable bid for an achievement that looked folly even to speculate upon a few weeks ago disappeared at the crucial time of need.

So much is spoken about momentum in tennis and things certainly seemed to be riding in Murray's favour against Richard Gasquet as he silenced the notoriously partisan crowd of the Palais Omnisports with a spellbinding performance in the second set that denied his opponent even a game.

However, things rapidly unravelled for Murray as not just the match but the possibility of joining the world's top players in Shanghai came down to a test of nerve and the ability to focus on simply winning rather than the prizes it held. Ultimately Gasquet, a year older, more experienced in the most pressurised of situations and urged on by more than 8,000 spectators, proved more adept to cope with the situation. Gasquet won 6-3, 0-6, 6-4 to set up a semi-final today against David Nalbandian, of Argentina, with only Marcos Baghdatis, of Cyprus, who plays Rafael Nadal, of Spain, in the other semi-final, able to stop him from reaching Shanghai.

"It's quite disappointing when you win more games and more points and don't win," Murray said. "At that stage it was pretty much a one-set match to go to Shanghai. Both of us clearly wanted to win."

Now all that remains for Murray is the possibility of a place as the travelling second reserve for Shanghai. This is an option that invariably provides some playing action and one that could be even more profitable with Andy Roddick planning to travel to China despite a heel injury that could compromise his involvement for the United States in the Davis Cup final against Russia next month.

Murray, though, is not keen. "I'm not going to go all the way over to Shanghai when it's a time where I'm going to be taking a break, and I plan to start training really hard the week right after," he said. "I'd rather not go all the way over there and end up not playing a match. Two guys need to pull out. I'm not expecting that to happen."

In the end, Murray had nobody to blame but himself and once again an overreliance on gambling with drop shots proved his downfall. Much of Murray's tennis was sublime but twice he let himself down with lamentable games. One in the first set, when two drop shots cost him his serve, can be banished to the depths of his memory but another in the final set, when the stress levels were at their zenith, will take some forgetting. His serve was broken to love in the fifth game as the impetuosity of youth led to a series of errors before once again Gasquet got to a drop shot and followed up with a merciless overhead smash.

Gasquet has long been lauded as one of the most talented young players in the game. The 21-year-old is presently coached by Yannick Noah, the former French Open champion, and there was an element of panache in the way he outplayed his opponent in the first set. Employing delightful balance and the sort of one-handed backhand that makes purists purr,

he forced Murray into taking what could be construed as unnecessary risks and reaped the benefit.

Dropping only four points on his serve, it seemed as though Gasquet was on a fast track to victory but Murray can never be discounted and superiority in the match swiftly changed with the Scot totally dominant for six games.

Previously, three of Murray's rivals in the tense tussle for a ticket to China had fallen by the wayside and before long Tommy Robredo suffered the same fate as James Blake, Tomas Berdych and Tommy Haas. Then Mikhail Youzhny, still a mathematical hopeful, could not stop an apparently rejuvenated Nadal.

Sharpshooter Andy Murray must mix it with the best next year

Simon Barnes

Published at 12:00AM, November 5 2007

It was like seeing him for the first time all over again. Andy Murray has had such a rotten season, one dominated by his wrist injury, that I'd half-forgotten what it was like to watch him at the top of his game. And he did get there, at least in patches, last week at the BNP Paribas Masters in Paris.

"I know I can hit shots that others don't try," he said. At his best, he combines power with astonishing touch, and for that reason we should start wondering if Murray can break the monopoly at the top; the monopoly shared unequally between Roger Federer and Rafael Nadal. Shot by shot, Murray is good enough.

We have grown used to disappointment in tennis in this country. But there was Murray in Paris, looking at times like the most inventive shot-maker in the game, playing with a thrilling certainty. It was a nice way to bring the season to a close, even with Murray missing the Tennis Masters Cup, the end-of-term treat in Shanghai.

In sport in general, and in tennis in particular, we are used to wishing our lives away, always believing that next year is the year that matters. That next year, everything will be all right and all our dreams will come true. No question, Murray needs a big year next year. And in fits and starts in Paris, I had an unholy feeling that it might actually be coming, that the frustration of this year might alchemise into the gold of achievement. Next year, he needs to feel at ease in the company of the very best.

It comes down to one very simple issue: Murray has to stop being a Promising Young Man. He needs to see himself as a man who sits at the high table as of right. He might have done so this year but for injury. But next year – well, my own ambition is to get through Murray's year without once using the word "potential".

Andy Murray and Brad Gilbert end partnership

Times Online and Agencies

Published at 4:43PM, November 14 2007

Andy Murray, the British number one, has confirmed he has parted company with his coach Brad Gilbert, as [revealed exclusively](#) by The Times this morning. The American has been coaching the current world number 11 since July 2006 after signing a three-year contract with the Lawn Tennis Association.

But following speculation of a deteriorating personal relationship, Murray said: “Despite being injured for almost four months this year, I am pleased with my 2007 results and am very grateful for the help that the LTA have given me by providing Brad Gilbert as a coach. “But the time has come to move on to the next stage of my career.

“I am ranked 11 in the world and can now afford to pay my own way and so will now hire a team of experts each to fulfil a specified role in the development of my tennis and fitness.” Gilbert’s was also handed the remit by the LTA to help “raise the playing and coaching standards in the UK”, but whether he will continue with this after splitting with Murray is unclear.

Roger Draper, Chief Executive of the LTA added: “Andy has had another great year and despite a serious injury has demonstrated that he is a truly world class player. Whilst working with Brad he has broken into the top 10, won two ATP titles and reached three finals.

“Andy’s success is vital for British tennis and he has become an inspirational figure for followers of the sport. It is essential that he has a team around him that will allow him to fulfil his potential. We are currently reviewing the situation in relation to Brad and will look to make a decision in the near future.”

Gilbert had previously worked with former world number ones Andre Agassi and Andy Roddick and the Scot reached a career high of eight in June.

And despite missing three months of this year through injury, Murray was just one victory from securing a place in the Masters Cup for the world’s best eight players.

Andy Murray can't go it alone

The British No 1 needs to replace Brad Gilbert to maintain his progress

Pat Cash

Published: 18 November 2007

SO WHO is really going to benefit from Andy Murray's choice to end the latest chapter of his career by disposing of the coaching knowhow and experience of Brad Gilbert? Not the player who still has plenty to learn and has got rid of one of the best available teachers. And certainly not the Lawn Tennis Association, who have seen their gamble of paying far more than the going rate embarrassingly backfire in their faces.

It remains to be seen whether the only party that is certainly going to profit from this rather predictable end to the British tennis year is Gilbert himself. Anyone who has seen his impressive home in Northern California's Bay Area will agree that he's always watched his money wisely and invested with great intelligence. Now we must wait to see what he is left with after his lawyers and the LTA work out a severance package.

If things do end this way it would be a travesty. This is money that has been supposedly donated to the LTA by Wimbledon for the improvement of British tennis. I am a member of the All England Club and I would be offended by the fact that the profits from the Championships could end up this way.

Don't knock Gilbert for negotiating a payoff because this is business. I've been financially burned a couple of times after coaching players and not getting what I was owed. So all credit to Brad if he was careful enough to ensure the small print in his contract stipulated payment for the full three years of his deal to specifically coach Murray. It wasn't he who called a halt and he always honoured his side of the deal.

However, as anyone even vaguely aware of the British tennis scene should appreciate, the money should be going to worthwhile causes like Ian Hampton, who wants to get better tennis facilities for inner-city schools so that perhaps an English set of Williams sisters might be unearthed in Brixton, Handsworth or Moss Side. It should be going to Tony Hawks, who needs it in his laudable campaign to improve the thousands of run-down tennis courts in public parks.

This should be the LTA's prime task rather than paying for the personal coach of the top-ranked player in the nation. Believe me, there was a sense of disbelief around the

tennis world when word got round just how much Gilbert was being paid by the national federation to coach Murray.

This sort of thing just doesn't happen, now it's all ended up in a mess and there's nobody to blame but the LTA for their actions.

I can see Murray's point of view. If he was not getting on with Brad, as was patently the case around the time of the US Open, then things had to come to an end. It's a bit like a marriage, ultimately there's no future in repeatedly trying to make things work if the chemistry is blatantly wrong. However, Murray is still only 20 and very much in his infancy as a top flight performer on the men's tour. He's not Roger Federer, who can go into Grand Slams without a coach and be sufficiently self-assured to know he's doing the right things.

My experiences at the same age with Ian Barclay were perfect. He understood me, knew when to kick the backside and when to put his arm around my shoulder. There were times he had to tell me to work harder and others when he felt the time was right to ease off a little.

Andy Murray is very much his own guy. I've got to know him a little bit commentating on the Wimbledon men's final with him this summer and then playing Turbo Tennis at the O2 arena. I see aspects of his character that tell me he knows exactly where he wants to go and that is good in such a youngster. But he is too inexperienced to do that on his own for a couple of years. Fitness is a huge aspect of the game and Murray needs somebody to ensure he gets the right work done. Employing a mate as a coach won't do because there will be occasions when the hard word is required. Talk of a committee of coaches with specific tasks is all well and good but ultimately there has to be somebody in charge.

- THE LTA were believed to be finalising a deal last night that would involve Gilbert continuing to work with other British players, but doing fewer hours and thus being paid less. The LTA said the American would not get a £1m payoff.

Andy Murray lines up Miles Maclagan as he prepares for year of opportunity

Neil Harman, Tennis Correspondent

Published at 12:00AM, November 29 2007

Andy Murray has asked Miles Maclagan, the former Great Britain Davis Cup player who was born in Zambia of Scottish parents, to spend three weeks with him at a training camp in Florida with a view to joining the team designed to take the British No 1 to the next stage of his tennis development.

Maclagan flew to the United States yesterday, excited at the opportunity to get to know Murray better, getting used to his manner and his modus operandi as the 20-year-old prepares mind and body to embark on what is being billed as a great year of opportunity. If the two really hit it off — they have an excellent relationship already but one not tested by one working for the other — it could become a permanent arrangement.

Two weeks ago — [as exclusively revealed in The Times](#) — Murray chose to part company after 16 months with Brad Gilbert, who will remain on the LTA's payroll for 20 weeks in 2008, to help to oversee the careers of Alex Bogdanovic, the 23-year-old British No 2, and others "in his age group" striving to improve their rankings and tour prospects. Gilbert has thus far refused all requests to discuss the parting of the ways, although he has confided that he did not see it coming.

Maclagan would offer a different approach. Quiet, unassuming but with a smashing manner and big heart, he could be the kind of person to bring the best out of Murray. And anyone whose parents' names are Ramsay and Elsie ought to go down well in the Murray household.

Remarkably, [in his column in The Sunday Times](#) two years ago, Pat Cash, the former Wimbledon singles champion, suggested that the pair should link up. He wrote: "Some might view my tip as off the wall, but I would nominate Miles Maclagan, the former British Davis Cup player who is doing a good job coaching the highly ranked doubles duo of Wayne Black and Kevin Ullyett. Miles may not have been a great player, but few of the really top coaches managed to hit the high spots. However, he is hard-working, diligent, extremely aware technically and works closely with Moose Stevens, a former Aussie Rules footballer who is one of the best fitness experts on the tour. And he's Scottish."

When Black and Ullyett went their separate ways, Maclagan coached the partnership of Ullyett and Paul Hanley, the Australian, and the pair ended this season ranked No 4 in the Stanford ATP doubles rankings and qualified for the Masters Cup in Shanghai this month. Now that partnership has split, with Ullyett joining forces with Jonas Björkman, the Swede, which left Maclagan searching for a new role.

Murray has said that he wanted to take his career on with someone he knows and as Hanley and Ullyett played in the leading tournaments across the world, Maclagan was a constant presence in the same locker-rooms and dining-rooms where the Scot worked and relaxed. The 33-year-old has been part of the Davis Cup coaching set-up, having joined the squad in Ukraine last year and played in three ties for Britain, notably partnering Tim Henman to a doubles victory over Paradorn Srichaphan and Danai Udomchoke, of Thailand, in Birmingham five years ago, before deciding to set out on his coaching career.

In Florida, Murray will be working on his new physical regimen with Matt Little and Jez Green, the latter of whom has also been working recently at an academy in Monte Carlo run by Dave Sammel, a former LTA coach who used to teach Maclagan. It is all starting to make perfect sense.

